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THE
HUGUENOT.

A TALE

OF

THE FRENCH PROTESTANTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"RICHELIEU," "THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER,"

"ATTILA," "DARNLEY," &c.

i.e. George Payne Rainsford James,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

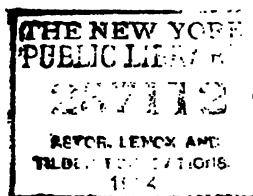
VOL. I.

NEW-YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, 82 CLIFF-STREET.

1839.

James



Charles H. Mack

2 1 14 0

ROY WILSON
OLIVER
VIRGIL

DEDICATION.

TO

CHARLES RUDOLPHE
L O R D C L I N T O N,

&c, &c., &c.

MY LORD,

ALTHOUGH I, of course, look upon the book, which I now venture to dedicate to one whom I so much esteem and respect, with those parental prejudices which make us often overlook all defects, and magnify any good qualities in our offspring, yet, believe me, I feel that it is very far inferior to that which I could wish to present to you. Do not, then, measure my regard by the value of the work, but accept it only as a very slight testimony of great esteem; and, at the same time, allow me, even in my Dedication, to say a few words concerning the book itself.

I will not trouble you or the public with any reasoning upon the general conduct of the story; why I suddenly changed the scene here, or flew off to another character there; why I gave but a glimpse of such a personage, or dwelt long and minutely upon another. I believe and trust that those who read the work attentively will discover strong reasons for all such proceedings, and I am quite sure that much thought and care was bestowed on each step of the kind before it was taken. Your own good taste will decide whether I was right or wrong, and blame or approve, I know, whatever I might plead. The public will do so also; and, as a

★Charles T. Harbeck

24, MAR. 04

general rule, I think it best to conceal, as far as possible, in all cases, the machinery of a composition of this kind, suffering the wheels to produce their effect without being publicly exhibited.

I have heard many authors blamed, however, and, doubtless, have been so myself, for frequently changing the scene or character before the reader's eyes. There are people who read a romance only for the story, and these are always displeased with anything that interrupts their straightforward progress. But nature does not tell *her* stories in such a way as these readers desire; and, in the course of human life, there are always little incidents occurring, which seem of no earthly importance at the time, but which, in years long after, affect persons and produce events where no one could imagine that such a connexion is likely to be brought about.

I have always in this respect, as in all others, endeavoured to the best of my abilities to copy nature; and those readers who pass over little incidents, because they seem at the time irrelevant, or run on to follow the history of one character whenever a less interesting personage is brought upon the scene, will derive little either of profit or pleasure from any well-constructed work of fiction. I have, as far as possible, avoided in all my works bringing prominently forward any character or any scene which has not a direct influence upon the progress and end of the tales; but I have equally avoided pointing out to the superficial reader, by any flourish of trumpets, that the personage he thinks of no importance is "to turn out a great man in the end," or that the scene which seems unconnected and irrelevant will be found not without results.

Besides these considerations, however, I trust every romance-writer in the present day proposes to himself greater objects than the mere telling of a good story. He who, in the course of a well-conceived and interesting tale, excites our good passions to high and noble aspirations; depicts our bad passions so as to teach us to abhor and govern them; arrays our sympathies on the side of virtue, benevolence, and right; expands our hearts, and makes the circle of our feelings and affections more comprehensive; stores our imaginations with images bright, and sweet, and beautiful; makes us

DEDICATION.

▼

more intimately and philosophically acquainted with the characters of our fellow-men; and, in short, causes the reader to rise wiser and with a higher appreciation of all that is good and great, attains the grand object at which every man should aim, and deserves the thanks and admiration of mankind. Even he who makes the attempt, though without such success, does something, and never can write altogether in vain.

That you, to whom I inscribe this work, can appreciate such purposes, and will encourage the attempt, even where, as in these pages, it goes little beyond endeavour, is no slight pleasure to me: nor is it an unmeaning or insincere compliment when I say, that though I yield my own opinions to no man, yet I have often thought of you and yours while I have been writing these volumes. I know not whether you remember saying one day, after we had visited together the school instituted by our noble acquaintance Guicciardini, "that whether it succeeded or failed, the endeavour to do good ought to immortalize him." Perhaps you have forgotten the words, but I have not.

Allow me, ere I end this long epistle, to add something in regard to the truth of the representations made in the work, and the foundation on which the story rests. If you will look into the curious "*Mémoires Historiques sur la Bastille*," published in 1789 (vol. i., page 203), you will find some of the bare facts, as they are stated in the Great Register of the Bastille, on which the plot of the tale that follows entirely hinges.

Of course I cannot forestall my story by alluding more particularly to those facts; and I have only further to say on that subject, that for many reasons I have altered the names inserted in the Great Register. I have also taken the same liberty with regard to the scenes of many events which really occurred, placing in Poitou what sometimes took place in Dauphiny, sometimes in Provence. Nor have I felt myself bound in all instances to respect the exact dates, having judged it expedient to bring many events within a short compass which were spread over a greater space of time. I have endeavoured, however, to represent most accurately, without prejudice or favour, the conduct of the French Catholics to French Protestants, and of Protestants to Catholics, during the persecutions of the seventeenth century. My love and esteem for many

excellent Catholics—priests as well as laity—would prevent me, I believe, from viewing the question of the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and the consequences thereof, with a prejudiced eye; and when I read the following passages in the writings, not of a Protestant, but of a sincere Catholic, I am only inclined to doubt whether I have not softened the picture of persecution.

“ Il restait peu à faire pour exciter le zèle du roi contre une religion solennellement frappée des plus éclatans anathèmes par l'église universelle, et qui s'en était elle-même frappée la première en se séparant de tout l'antiquité sur des points de foi fondamentaux.

“ Le roi était devenu dévot, et dévot dans la dernière ignorance. A la dévotion se joignit la politique. On voulut lui plaire par les endroits qui le touchaient le plus sensiblement, la dévotion et l'autorité. On lui peignit les Huguenots avec les plus noires couleurs; un état dans un état, parvenu à ce point de licence à force de désordres, de révoltes, de guerres civiles, d'alliances étrangères, de résistance à force ouverte contre les rois ses prédécesseurs, et jusqu'à lui-même réduit à vivre en traité avec eux. Mais on se garda bien de lui apprendre la source de tant de maux, les origines de leurs divers dégrès et de leurs progrès, pourquoi et par qui les Huguenots furent premièrement armés, puis soutenus, et surtout de lui dire un seul mot des projets de si longue main pourpensés, des horreurs et des attentats de la ligue contre sa couronne, contre sa maison, contre son père, son aïeul, et tous les siens.

“ On lui voila avec autant de soin ce que l'évangile, et d'après cette divine loi les apôtres, et tous les pères et leur suite, enseignent la manière de prêcher Jésus Christ, de convertir les infidèles et les hérétiques, et de se conduire en ce qui regarde la religion. On toucha un dévot de la douceur de faire, aux dépens d'autrui, une pénitence facile qu'on lui persuada sure pour l'autre monde. * * * * *

“ Les grands ministres n'étaient plus alors. Le Tellier au lit de la mort, son funeste fils était le seul qui restât, car Seignelay ne faisait guère que poindre. Louvois, avide de guerre, atterré sous le poids d'une trêve de vingt ans, qui ne faisait presque que d'être signée, espéra qu'un si grand coup porté aux Huguenots réunirait tout

le Protestantisme de l'Europe, et s'applaudit en attendant de ce que le roi ne pouvant frapper sur les Huguenots que par ses troupes, il en serait le principal exécuteur, et par là de plus en plus en crédit. L'esprit et le génie de Madame de Maintenon, tel qu'il vient d'être représenté avec exactitude, n'était rien moins que propre, ni capable d'aucune affaire au-delà de l'intrigue. Elle n'était pas née ni nourrie à voir sur celle-ci au-delà de ce qui lui en était présenté, moins encore pour ne pas saisir avec ardeur une occasion si naturelle de plaire, d'admirer, de s'affermir de plus en plus par la dévotion. Qui d'ailleurs eût su un mot de ce qui ne se délibérait qu'entre le confesseur, le ministre alors comme unique, et l'épouse nouvelle et chérie ; et qui de plus eût osé contredire ! C'est ainsi que sont menés à tout, par une voie ou par une autre, les rois qui, par grandeur, par défiance, par abandon à ceux qui les tiennent, par paresse ou par orgueil, ne se communiquent qu'à deux ou trois personnes, et bien souvent à moins, et qui mettent entre eux et tout le reste de leurs sujets une barrière insurmontable.

“ La révocation de l'édit de Nantes, sans le moindre prétexte et sans aucun besoin, et les diverses proscriptions plutôt que déclarations qui la suivirent, furent les fruits de ce complot affreux qui dépeupla un quart du royaume ; qui ruina son commerce ; qui l'affaiblit dans toutes ses parties ; qui le mit si longtemps au pillage public et avoué des dragons ; qui autorisa les tourmens et les supplices dans lesquels ils firent réellement mourir tant d'innocens de tout sexe par milliers ; qui ruina un peuple si nombreux ; qui déchira un monde de familles ; qui arma les parens contre les parens pour avoir leur bien et les laisser mourir de faim ; qui fit passer nos manufactures aux étrangers, fit fleurir et regorger leurs états aux dépens du nôtre, et leur fit bâtir de nouvelles villes ; qui leur donna le spectacle d'un si prodigieux peuple proscrit, nu, fugitif, errant sans crime, cherchant asile loin de sa patrie ; qui mit nobles, riches, vieillards, gens souvent très-estimés pour leur piété, leur savoir, leur vertu, des gens aisés, faibles, délicats, à la ruine, et sous le nerf très-effectif du comite, pour cause unique de religion ; enfin qui, pour comble de toutes horreurs, remplit toutes les provinces du royaume de parjures et de sacrilèges, où tout retentissait de hurlemens de ces infortunées victimes de l'erreur, pendant que tant d'autres

sacrifiaient leur conscience à leurs biens et à leur repos, et achetaient l'un et l'autre par des abjurations simulées, d'où sans intervalle on les traînait à adorer ce qu'ils ne croyaient point, et à recevoir réellement le divin corps du saint des saints, tandis qu'ils demeuraient persuadés qu'ils ne mangeaient que du pain qu'ils devaient encore abhorrer. Telle fut l'abomination générale enfantée par la flatterie et par la cruauté. De la torture à l'abjuration, et de celle-ci à la communion, il n'y avait pas souvent vingt-quatre heures de distance, et leurs bourreaux étaient leurs conducteurs et leurs témoins. Ceux qui, par la suite, eurent l'air d'être changés avec plus de loisir, ne tardèrent pas par leur fuite ou par leur conduite à démentir leur prétendu retour."—*St. Simon*, vol. xiii., p. 113, ed. 1829.

I have now nothing further to say, my dear Lord Clinton, but to beg your pardon for having already said so much, and to express a hope that you and the public will deal leniently by that which is now offered to you, with the highest respect and esteem, by

Yours most faithfully,

G. P. R. JAMES.

*Fair Oak Lodge, Petersfield,
17th Nov., 1838.*

THE HUGUENOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERO, HIS FRIEND, AND HIS DWELLING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

THERE is a small town in one of the remote provinces of France, about ten miles from the seashore, and two or three hundred from the capital, on the appearance of which it may be as well to dwell for a short time; noticing not alone its houses and its streets as they appeared in the seventeenth century, but its inhabitants, their feelings and their customs at that period.

Were we not to make this formal sort of presentation, the reader would feel as if set down suddenly amid a crowd of strangers, with no one to introduce him, with no one to unpadlock the barrier which the cautious laws of society set up between man and man, to guard against the wild-beast propensities of the race of intellectual tigers to which we belong. Now, however, if we manage skilfully, the reader may become as familiar with the people of another day and scenes of another land as if they had been the playfellows of his childhood and the haunts of his youth; and may go on calmly with those to whom he is thus introduced through the dark and painful events which are recorded in the pages that follow.

That part of France in which our scene is laid presents features which differ very much from the dull and uninteresting aspect of the land from Calais to Paris, and from Paris to the mountains of Switzerland—the route generally pursued by our travelling countrymen, whether they go forth to make what is usually called the grand tour, or content themselves with idling away a long space of misspent time among the Helvetian Mountains. In the district that I speak of, the face of the country, though it cannot perhaps be called moun-

tainous, is richly varied, running up into occasional high and pointed hills, presenting frequent masses of rock and wood, diversified by a mile or two, here and there, of soft pasture and meadow; with innumerable streams, some calm and peaceful, some fierce and torrent-like, some sparkling and playful, giving an air of life and glad activity to the land through which they flow. These manifold streams shed also a hue of indescribable verdure, a fresh leafiness of aspect, that is most grateful to the eye; and though there is not there, as in our own land, the frequent hedgerow, with its sweet village associations, yet there is no want of high umbrageous trees scattered here and there, besides the thick woods that in many places occupy several leagues in extent, and the lesser copses that nest themselves in many a dell.

The district that we speak of is bright in its skies and warm in its sunshine, though it is not precisely in the region of the richest vine; and there are scarcely five days during six months of the year in which, on every stony bank or on the short soft turf above, the large lizards may not be seen basking in their coats of green and gold. There are not, indeed, the cloudless skies of Italy, which, notwithstanding their splendid colouring, are insipid from their very cloudlessness: no, but wreathed in grand masses by the free air, sometimes drifting from the British Channel, sometimes sweeping from the wide Western Ocean, the clouds and the sunshine sport together in the heaven, while the shadow and the light chase each other over the earth below, and ever and anon comes down a passing shower, refreshing the lands it lights upon, and leaving them brighter than before.

On the top of one of the tall rocky hills we have mentioned, in very remote feudal times—for we find it mentioned in all the wars undertaken by the Edwards and the Henries in their vain endeavours to grasp a crown that did not belong to them—a town had been built and fortified, circumscribed by large stone walls flanked by round towers, and crowned by the square keep of a castle, only one wall of which has been left for now near a century and a half. This town was of small size, occupying nothing but the summit of the hill, and was strictly confined within the walls; and, indeed, below, on three sides, were such steep ascents—in some

places showing precipitous spaces of rude rock, and in others covered with short, green, slippery turf—that it was scarcely possible for the inhabitants to have built beyond the walls, except on one side, even if they had been so inclined.

In such times of danger, however, it had been the object of those who possessed the town to keep that fourth side, by which the ascent was more easy, clear from all houses and buildings of any kind, so that the quarrels from the crossbow, the arrows from the bow, or the balls from the cannon—as different ages brought different inventions—might sweep down unimpeded upon any approaching enemy, and that the eye might also have a free range to discover the approach of a foe. Thus that gentler slope was not even broken by a road till the end of the sixteenth century, the way up to the town from the valley below being constructed with great skill and care upon one of the steepest sides of the hill, by means of wide short platforms, each of which was defended by some particular fortification of its own, while the whole line of the valley and the lower part of the road were commanded by the cannon of the castle of St. Anne, a rude old fortress on an inferior hill, of little or no use to any persons but those who possessed the higher and more important works above. Through the valley and winding round the foot of the hill of St. Anne was a wide, clear, beautiful stream, navigable up to that spot, and falling into the sea at the distance of ten or twelve miles in a direct line, but which contrived to extend its course, by the tortuous path that it pursued among the hills, to a length of nearly twenty leagues.

Such as we have described was the situation, in feudal times, of the small town that we shall call Morseiul; but, ere the commencement of our tale, those feudal times had passed away. Even during the wars of the League the town had remained in tranquillity and repose. It was remote from the general scene of strife; and although it had sent out many who aided, and not insignificantly, in upholding the throne of Henry IV., there was but one occasion on which the tide of war flowed near its walls, and then speedily retreated, and left it unassailed.

Under these circumstances fortifications were soon neglected; precautions were no longer taken; the cannon for half a century remained upon the walls unused;

rust and honeycomb began to gnaw into the heart of the iron ; sheds were erected in the embrasures ; houses succeeded ; gardens were laid out in the round towers ; the castle of St. Anne fell utterly into ruins ; and some of the patriotic and compassionate inhabitants thought it a hard tax upon the sinews of the horses, who in those days carried from place to place the merchandise of the country, to be forced to climb the zigzag path of one of the more precipitous sides of the hill. Thus, in the early part of the reign of Louis XIII., a petition was addressed by the inhabitants to the count, who still retained all his feudal rights and privileges, beseeching him to construct or permit the construction of a gate upon the southern side of the town, and a road down the easier descent.

The count, who was a good-humoured man, a nobleman of the school of Henry IV., and as fond of the people of the good town as they were of him, was quite willing to gratify them in any reasonable desire ; but he was the more moved to do what they wished in the present instance, inasmuch as some ten or fifteen years before he had himself broken through the old rules and regulations established in the commune, and not only built himself a chateau beyond the walls of that very side, but laid out a space of two or three acres of ground in such a manner as to give him shade when he wanted it, and sunshine when the shade was not agreeable.

Of the chateau we shall speak hereafter : but it is only here necessary to say, that in building this dwelling beyond the walls, the Count de Morseiul of that day had forgotten altogether the possibility of carrying a road down that side of the hill. He had constructed a way for himself into the town by enlarging an old postern in the walls, which he caused to open into his garden ; and by this postern, whenever he sought to issue forth into the country beyond, he took his way into the town, traversed the square, and followed the old zigzag road down the steep side of the hill. The peasantry, indeed, had not failed to think of that which their lord had overlooked ; and when they had a dozen or two of pigeons, or a pair of fowls, or a fat calf to present to the seigneur, they almost invariably brought it by the slope up the hill. A path had thus been worn from the valley below in the precise direction which

was best fitted for the road; and when the good townsmen presented their petition to the count, it instantly struck him how very convenient such a road would be to himself as well as to them.

Now the count was neither a cunning nor an ungenerous man; and the moment he saw that the advantage to be derived would be to himself, he determined to open the gate, and make the road at his own expense, without subjecting the commune or the peasantry to *corvée* or *fine*. He told the inhabitants so at once, and they, as they well might be, were grateful to him in consequence. He made the road, and a handsome one it was; and he threw down a part of the wall, and erected a splendid gate in its place. He gave no name, indeed, to either; but the people immediately and universally bestowed a name on both, and called them the Count's Gate and the Count's Road, so that the act was perpetuated by the grateful memory of those whom it benefited.

As, following the example of the earth on which we live, everything upon its surface moves forward, or, perhaps we may say, appears to move forward, while very likely it is going but in a circle, the opening of the gate and the making of the road was speedily followed by another step, which was the building of houses by the roadside; so that, at the period when our tale commences, the whole aspect, appearance, and construction of the town was altered. A long street, with gardens at the back of the houses, extended all the way down the gentle slope of the hill; the gate had been widened, the summit had been cleared of a great number of small houses, and a view was opened straight up into a fine, gay-looking market-square at the top, with the ruined wall of the old keep raising its high head, covered with ivy, on the western side, and to the north the little church, with its tall, thin-slatted spire rising high, not only above the buildings of the town itself, but the whole of the country round, and forming a remarkable object, which was seen for many leagues at sea.

We are in this account supposing the reader to be looking up the street, which was turned towards the south, and was, consequently, full of sunshine towards the middle of the day. It would, indeed, have been intolerably hot in the summer, had it not been that the

blessed irregularity of the houses contrived to give some shade at every hour of the four-and-twenty. But from the bottom of that street almost up to the top were to be seen, upon the left hand, rising above the buildings of the street itself, the weathercocks, and round turrets, and pointed roofs, and loopholes, and windows innumerable, which marked the chateau built by the count who had constructed the road; while here and there, too, were also seen the tops of the tall limes and elms with which he had shaded his gardens, and which had now grown up into tall splendid trees, flourishing in the years which had brought him to decay and death.

Into the little town of Morseiul had been early introduced the doctrines of Calvin, and the inhabitants clung to those doctrines with peculiar pertinacity. They had constantly sent volunteers to the Protestant army; they had bestirred themselves in aid of La Rochelle, and had even despatched succour to the Protestants of the far south. The weak, bigoted, and treacherous Louis XIII. had declared that they were the most obstinate heretics in his dominions, and had threatened against them many things, which the wisdom of his great minister had prevented him from performing. But the counts of Morseiul themselves had at all times rendered great services to the state; they had proved themselves on all occasions gallant and determined soldiers and skilful politicians; and, though they too held firm by the religion of their ancestors, and set equally at defiance both threats and seductions—which conduct formed the strongest link between them and their people—Richelieu had judged that it would be hazardous to drive them into open resistance to the crown. We may indeed surmise that he judged it unnecessary also, inasmuch as there can be no doubt that in his dealings with the Huguenots he treated them solely as a political party, and not as a religious sect.

Such being the case, though somewhat courting the persecutions of the times, the town of Morseiul had been left unmolested in the exercise of its religious tenets, and had enjoyed not only all the liberty which was granted to the Protestants of France by the edict of Nantes, but various other privileges, obtained perhaps by a little encroachment, and retained by right of prescription.

The inhabitants were a hardy and determined race,

frank and good-humoured, and possessing, from various points in their position, a great degree of simplicity in manners and character, mingled with much religious fervour. They had indeed, of late years, been somewhat polished, or, perhaps one might call it, corrupted. They had acquired more wants and more wishes from the increasing luxuriousness of the day; had heard with wonder, and not, perhaps, without some longing, of the splendours, and the marvels, and the gayeties of the court of Louis XIV., then in the bright and butterfly days of its youthful ostentation; and they felt strongly and beneficially the general impulse given to every sort of commerce by the genius of Colbert, and applied themselves to derive the utmost advantage therefrom, by pursuing with skill, activity, and perseverance various manufactures, in which they displayed no small ingenuity. A good number of them had become wealthy, and all of them, indeed, were well off in the station of life in which they were placed. The artisan was rich for an artisan, as well as the burgess for a burgess; but they were all simple in their habits, not without their little pride, or without their luxuries on a holyday; but frugal and thoughtful as they were industrious. Such was the town of Morseiul and its inhabitants in the year 168—.

We must now turn to the chateau of the count, and to its denizens at the time of the opening of our tale. The chateau was built, as we have said, on the outside of the walls of the town, and was one of those odd buildings of which many a specimen has come down to us. It seemed to have been built by detached impulses, and upon no general plan, though, to admit nothing but the truth, the construction was attributable all to one person. The great hall was a long, wide-spreading piece of architecture, with a high roof, and a row of windows turned to the south side, which was the front of the chateau. Then came two or three square masses of stonework on either side of the hall, with the gables projecting to the front, no two of them of the same height and size; and many of them separated either by a tall round tower, with loopholes all the way up, like buttonholes in the front of a waistcoat, or broken towards the roof by a turret stuck on and projecting from the rest of the building. On the western side of the chateau was a large square tower, with numerous

windows, placed with some degree of regularity; and on the eastern was an octangular tower, containing a separate entrance of a somewhat Gothic character. Two large wings projected behind towards the town, on which the chateau unceremoniously turned its back, and the large space of ground thus enclosed was again divided into two by a heavy transverse mass of building, as irregular as the external parts of the whole. The mansion was completed by the stables and offices for the servants and retainers, and the whole was pitched in the centre of a platform which had formerly been one of the bastions of the town.

Behind the chateau, and between the building and the walls, were numerous trees, giving that space the name of the bocage, and through this lay the little walk that led to the postern, which was originally the only exit from the chateau. In front was a tolerably wide esplanade, extending to the edge of the bastion, and from the edge of the terrace descended a flight of steps to the slope below, on which had been laid out a flower-garden, separated from the rest of the ground by a stone wall, surmounted by flowerpots in the shape of vases. The remaining portion of the space enclosed was planted, according to the taste of that day, with straight rows of trees, on the beauties of which it is unnecessary to dwell.

The interior of the castle was fitted up in the taste of the reign of Henry IV. and Louis XIII., few changes having taken place since the time it was furnished, immediately after it was built. Some of the rooms, indeed, contained the furniture of the older castle formerly inhabited by the counts, which furniture was of a much more remote age, and had been condemned, by scornful posterity, to the dusty oblivion which we so fondly pile upon our ancestors. It may be as well, however, to conduct the reader into one of the rooms of that chateau, and, telling him that we have ourselves sat therein, furnished exactly as it was then furnished, and looking exactly as it then looked, endeavour to make him see it as the glass of memory now gives it back to us.

It was a large oblong room, with a vaulted roof: not domeshaped, indeed, for it was flat at the top; but from the walls towards the centre, it sloped for a considerable way before it received the flattened form which we mention. It was, indeed, a foursided vault, with the top

of the arches cut off. On two sides were windows, or perhaps we should call them casements, with the glass set in leaden frames, and opening only in part. The hearth and chimney were of enormous dimensions, with a seat on either side of the fireplace, which was a sort of raised platform of brickwork, ornamented with two large andirons, grinning with lions' heads, for the reception of the fuel.

Over the chimney again was a wide slab of marble, supported by two marble scrolls; and a tablet, on which was recorded, with very tolerable Latinity, that that chateau had been built by Francis, Count of Morseiul, in the year of grace one thousand five hundred and ninety. Above this marble, far blacker than the dark oak paneling which supported it, hung an immense ebony frame, carved with a thousand curious figures, and containing a large round mirror of polished metal, reflecting, though in a different size, all the objects that the room contained. On the two sides of the chamber were one or two fine portraits by Rubens and Vandyck, also in ebony frames, but cursed with an internal border of gold. A multitude of high-backed chairs, only fitted for men in armour and ladies with whalebone bodices; four cabinets of ebony, checkered with small lines of inlaid ivory, with immense locks, marked out by heavy, but not inelegant silver shields; and two or three round tables, much too small for the size of the room, made up the rest of the furniture of the apartment, if we except some curious specimens of porcelain, and one or two curiosities brought by different members of the family from foreign lands. There was also a lute upon one of the tables, and ten long glasses, with a vein of gold in their taper stalks, ranged in battle array upon the mantelpiece.

The moment at which we shall begin our tale was about the hour of dinner in the province, at that period a very different hour from that which we dine in the present day. The windows were all open, the bright sunshine was pouring in and throwing the small square panes into lozenges upon the flooring; and from that room, which was high up in the castle, might be seen as wide spread and beautiful a landscape as ever the eye rested upon, a world of verdure, streams, and woods, and hills, with the bright sky above.

Such was the chamber and its aspect at the period

that we speak of: and we must now turn to those who inhabited it, and, in the first place, must depict them to the reader's eye, before we enter into any remarks or detailed account of their several characters, which, perhaps, we may be inclined to give in this instance, even while we admit that in general it is far better to suffer our personages, to develop themselves and tell their own tale to the reader.

In all, there were some seven persons in that room; but there were only two upon whom we shall at present pause. They were seated at a table in the midst, on which were spread forth various viands in abundance, upon plates of silver of a rich and handsome form; while a profusion of the same metal, in the shape of cups, forks, spoons, and lavers, appeared upon another table near, which had been converted into a temporary sort of buffet. Ranged on the same buffet was also a multitude of green glass bottles, containing apparently, by their dusty aspect and well-worn corks, several kinds of old and choice wine; and five servants in plain but rich liveries, according to the fashion of that day, busied about to serve the two superior persons at the table.

Those two persons were apparently very nearly of the same age, about the same height; and in corporeal powers they seemed also evenly matched; but in every other respect they were as different as can well be conceived. The one who sat at the side of the table farthest from the door was a man of about six or seven-and-twenty years of age, with a dark brown complexion, clear and healthy, though not florid, and with large, full, deep-coloured gray eyes, fringed with long black lashes. His hair and mustaches were jet black; and the character of his countenance, for the moment at least, was serious and thoughtful. He was evidently a very powerful and vigorous man, deep-chested, long in the arm; and though, at first look, his form seemed somewhat spare, yet every motion displayed the swelling of strong muscles called into action; and few there were in that day who could have stood unmoved a buffet from his hand. Such was Albert, Count of Morseuil, an officer so distinguished during the first wars of Louis XIV. that it is only necessary to name him to bring to the reader's recollection a long train of splendid actions.

Opposite to him sat a friend and comrade, who had

gone through many a campaign with him, who had shared watchings, and dangers, and toils, had stood side by side with him in the "imminent deadly breach," and who was very much beloved by the count, although the other often contrived to tease and annoy him, and sometimes to give him pain, by a certain idle levity which had arisen among the young nobles of France some twenty years before, and had not yet been put out by that great extinguisher, the courtly form and ceremony which Louis XIV. placed upon every movement of the imagination.

The friend was, as we have said, very different from his host. Although not more than a year younger than the count, he had a less manly look, which might, perhaps, be owing to the difference of colouring; for he was of that fair complexion which the pictures of Vandyck have shown us can be combined with great vigour and character of expression. His features were marked and fine, his hazel eye piercing and quick, and his well-cut lip, varying indeed with every changing feeling or momentary emotion, still gave, by the peculiar bend in which it was fashioned when in repose, a peculiar tone of scornful playfulness to every expression his countenance assumed. In form, he appeared at first sight more powerful, perhaps, than the count; but a second glance was sufficient to show that such was not the case; and though there was indeed little difference, if anything, it was not in his favour.

We must pause for an instant to notice the dress of the two friends; not, indeed, to describe pourpoints or paint rich lace, but speak of their garments, as the taste thereof might be supposed to betoken some points in the character of each. The dress of the Count de Morseiul was in the taste of the day; which was certainly as bad a taste, as far as it affected the habiliments of the male part of the human race, as could be devised; but he had contrived, by the exercise of his own judgment in the colouring, to deprive it of a part of its frightfulness. The hues were all deep-toned, but rich and harmonious; and though there was no want of fine lace, the ribands, which were then the reigning mode of the day, were reduced to as few in number as any Parisian tailor would consent to withhold from the garb of a high nobleman.

His friend, however, the Chevalier d'Evran, having

opinions of his own, to which he adhered with a wilful pertinacity, did not fully give in to the fashion of the times; and retained, as far as possible, without making himself a spectacle, the costume of an earlier period. If we may coin a word for the occasion, there was a good deal of Vandyckism still about it. All the colours, too, were light and sunshiny; philomot and blue, and pink and gold; and jewels were not wanting, nor rich lace, where they could be worn with taste; for though the liking was for splendour, and for a shining and glittering appearance, yet in all the arrangements there was a fine taste visibly predominant.

Such, then, was the general appearance of the two friends; and after partaking of the good things which both the table and the buffet displayed—for during the meal itself the conversation was brief, and limited to a few questions and answers—the chevalier turned his chair somewhat more towards the window, and, gazing out over the prospect which was spread forth before his eyes, he said,

“And so, Albert, this is Morseiul; and here thou art again, after an absence of six years!”

“Even so, Louis,” replied the count, “even so. This is Morseiul; and I know not whether it be from that inherent love of the place in which some of our happiest days have been spent, or whether the country round us be in reality more lovely than any other that I have seen since I left it, yet, just when you spoke, I was thinking of asking you whether you were or were not satisfied with my boasted Morseiul.”

“It may well be lovelier than any you have seen since you left it,” replied the chevalier; “for, as far as I know aught of your history, and I think I could account for every day of your life since last you were here, you have seen nothing since but the flat prettiness of the Beauvoisis, the green spinage plate of the Cambresis, or the interminable flats of Flanders, where plains are varied by canals, and the only eminence to be seen for forty miles round one is the top of a windmill. Well may Morseiul be prettier than that, and no great compliment to Morseiul either; but I will tell you something more, Albert. I have seen Morseiul long ago. Ay, and sat in these halls, and drank of that wine, and looked out of that window, and thought then as I

think now, that it is, indeed, as fair a land as ever I should wish to cast my eyes on."

"Indeed, Louis!" exclaimed his companion; "how happens it, then, if you know the place so well, that you have listened to all my praises thereof, and come hither with me purposely to see it, without giving me one hint that you knew of the existence of such a place upon the surface of the globe?"

"Why, it has happened from two causes," replied the chevalier, "and perhaps from three. In the first place, did you never discover that I have the gift of secrecy in a very high degree?"

"Why, I have certainly discovered," replied the count, with a smile, "that you are fond of a mystery; and sometimes, Louis, when there's no great need of one."

"Most cuttingly and ungenerously answered," replied the chevalier, with a laugh; "but granting the fact, as a man does when he denies it strenuously in his mind all the time—but granting the fact, was not that one good and sufficient cause for my not saying a word about it? And, in the next place, Albert, if I had told you I had been here, and knew it very nearly as well as you do yourself, it would have deprived you of the whole pleasure of relating the wonders and the marvels of Morseiul, which would have been most ungenerous of me, seeing and knowing the delight you took therein; and perhaps there might be another cause," he added, in a graver tone. "Perhaps I might hesitate to talk to you, Albert; to you, with whom filial affection is not the evanescent thing that weeps like an April shower for half an hour over the loss of those we love, and then is wafted away in sparkling and in light; I might have hesitated, I say, to speak with you of times when one whom you have loved and lost sat in these halls and commanded in these lands."

"I thank you, Louis," replied the count; "I thank you from my heart; but you might have spoken of him. My memory of my dead father is something different from such things in general. It is the memory of him, Louis, and not of my own loss; and, therefore, as every thought of him is pleasing, satisfying, ennobling to my heart; as I can call up every circumstance in which I have seen him placed, every word which I have heard him speak, every action which I have seen him perform,

with pride, and pleasure, and advantage, I love to let my thoughts rest upon the memories of his life; and though I can behold him no more living, yet I may thus enable myself to dwell with him in the past. We may be sure, Louis, that those who try to banish the loved and the departed from their thoughts and from their conversation have more selfishness in their love, have more selfishness in their sorrow, than real affection or real esteem. The pangs which draw tears from us over the tomb may be permitted to us as a weakness not unenviable: a lapse of sorrow for the broken tie and the loss of immediate communion is also but a just tribute to ourselves and to the gone. But those who really loved the dead, and justly loved them, will cherish memory for their sakes; while those whose love was weak, or not founded on esteem, or selfish, may well give up a time to hopeless sorrow, and then banish the painful memory from their mind for ever; but it shows either that there must have been something wrong in the affection of the past, or a want of hope in the eternal meeting of the future. No, no, Louis, I live with my dead father every hour; I call to mind his looks, his words, his gestures; and as I never think to meet a man who could speak one evil word of him, I never fear to hear him mentioned and to dwell upon his name."

The chevalier was silent for a moment, for the feelings of his companion were too hallowed for a jest; but he replied immediately after, "I believe you are quite right, Albert; but, to banish all serious themes, which, you know, do not suit me, my love of mystery, which, as you well know, is a part of my nature, was quite sufficient to prevent my mentioning the subject. I wonder I was fool enough to let the whole secret out now. I should only have told you, by rights, just enough to excite your curiosity, in order that I might then disappoint you."

"As you have gone so far, however," replied the count, with a smile, "you may as well tell the whole story at once, as it must be told, sooner or later, I suppose."

"On my word, I do not know whether I can make up my mind to such unusual frankness," answered the chevalier; "I have already done quite enough to lose my reputation. However, as you seem anxious—"

"Not in the least," answered the count; "I am quite satisfied. I was so before, and am so still, and shall be

so if you resolutely maintain your mystery, concluding that you have some good reason for doing so."

"Oh no," answered the chevalier, "I never had a good reason for anything I did in my life: I make a point of never having one; and the very insinuation of such a thing will make me unravel the whole matter at once, and show you that there is no mystery at all in the matter. You may have heard, perchance, that the Duc de Rouvré, who, by-the-way, is just appointed governor of the province, has a certain property with a certain chateau called Ruffigny, which—"

"Which marches with my own," exclaimed the count.

"Exactly what I was going to say," rejoined the chevalier; "a certain property, called Ruffigny, which marches with your own, and a chateau thereupon some five leagues hence. Now, the excellent duke, being an old friend, and distant relation indeed, of my family, it is scarcely possible, with common decency, for me to be more than ten years at a time without visiting him; and accordingly, about ten years ago, I being then a sprightly youth, shortly about to fit on my first arms, came down and spent the space of about a month in that very chateau of Ruffigny, and the duke brought me over here to dine with your father, and hunt the wild boar in the woods behind St. Anne."

"It is very odd," said the count, "I have no recollection of it."

"How should you?" demanded his friend, "as you were then gone upon your first campaign, under Duras, upon the Rhine. It was not, in all probability, worth your father's while to write you word that a young scapegrace had been brought to dine with him, and had run his *couteau de chasse* up to the hilt in the boar's gullet."

"Oh, I now remember," exclaimed the count; "I heard of that, but I forgot the name. Have you not been here since then?"

"Not I," replied the chevalier. "The duke asked me, indeed, to return the following year; but something prevented him from returning himself, and I believe he has never come back to Ruffigny since. A man who has so many castles as he cannot favour any one of them above once in six or seven years or so."

"He is coming down now, however," replied the

count; "for, of course, the affairs of his government must bring him here, if it be but to hold the states."

"Ay, but he does not come to Ruffigny," replied the chevalier. "He goes to Poitiers. I know all about his movements; and I'll tell you what, Morseiul: take care how you go to visit him at Poitiers, for you might chance not to come back unscathed."

"How so?" demanded the count, turning sharply, as if with some surprise. "Is there anything new against us poor Huguenots?"

"Poo, I spoke not of that," replied the chevalier. "You sectarians seem to have a sort of hereditary feeling of martyrdom in you, as if your chief ancestor had been St. Bartholomew himself, and the saint, being skinned alive, had given the world a skinless posterity, which makes them all feel alarmed lest any one should touch them."

"It is an ominous name, St. Bartholomew, you must acknowledge, to the ears of a Huguenot," replied the count. "But what is it I have to fear, if not that, Louis?"

"What is it you have to fear?" rejoined the chevalier. "Why, a pair of the brightest eyes in all France; I believe I might say in all Europe."

The count shook his head with a smile.

"Well, then," continued the chevalier, "a pair of lips that look like twin roses; eyebrows that give a meaning to every lustrous look of the eyes; a hand small, white, and delicate, with fingers tapering and rounded like those with which the Venus of the Greeks gathers around her timid form the unwilling drapery; a foot such as no sandal-shod goddess of the golden age could match; and a form which would have left the sculptor nothing to seek in other beauties but herself."

The count laughed aloud. "I am quite safe," he said, "quite safe, Louis, quite safe. I have nothing on earth to fear."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion, in the same gay tone. "Pray, what panoply of proof do you possess sufficient to resist such arms as these when brought against you?"

"Mine is twofold," answered the count. "In the first place, your own enthusiasm cannot be misunderstood, and, of course, I do not become the rival of my friend. Our great hero, Condé, has set all soldiers a better example."

"What, then, do you intend to follow his example in regard to the Chatillon?" demanded the chevalier; "to yield me the lady, and, as soon as I am comfortably killed off, make love to my widow! But no, no, Albert, I stand not in your way; there are other attractions for me, I tell you fairly! Even if it were not so, let every man in love, as in war, do the best for himself. But, at all events, I tell you, take care of yourself if you go to Poitiers, unless, indeed, you have some better armour than the thought of rivalry with me."

"I must go to Poitiers, of course," replied the count, "when the governor comes down; but yet I shall go without fear, as I think you might by this time know. Have you not seen me among the fairest, and the gayest, and the sweetest of the world's daughters, and yet I do not think in all the catalogue you could find one cabalistic name sufficiently powerful to conjure up a sigh from my lips."

"Why, to say the truth," replied the chevalier, "I have often thought you as cold as a cannon-ball before it is fired; but, then, my dear count, all that time you have had something else to do, something to excite, to interest, and to engross you. But, now the stir and bustle of the camp is over; the march, the countermarch, the advance, the retreat is done; the fierce excitement of the battle-field does not bring forth all the energies of a fiery heart; the trumpet no longer calls you from the ear of the fair one before the whispered tale of love be well begun. In this piping time of peace, why, man, you have nothing for it but to make love or die of melancholy. If you have a charm, let us hear what it is!"

"Oh, I am no man of mysteries," replied the count, "and my tale is very soon told. It is just five years ago—I was at that time in the heyday of all sorts of passions; in love, I believe, with everything in woman's form that came in my way—when, after spending the winter in Paris, I came down here to take leave of my father before joining the army in Flanders. It seemed as if he felt that we were parting for the last time, for he gave me many a caution and many a warning regarding the woman that I might choose for my wife. He exacted no promise indeed, nor gave his counsels the shape of a command; but, among other injunctions, which I would most unwillingly violate, he strongly advised me never to wed any one of a differ-

Vol. I.—C

ent religious creed from myself. About the same time, however, a little incident occurred, which fancy worked up so strongly as to have had an effect upon my whole after feelings. You know the deep and bowery lanes and roads about the place; how beautifully the sunshine streams among them; how richly the songs of the birds sound in the trees above; how full of a sparkling and fanciful light is the whole scenery round us when we dive into its depths. I was always fond of wandering through these scenes, and one day about that time I was out alone, at some distance beyond the castle of St. Anne's, when suddenly, as I was musing, and gazing, and drinking in, as it were, the sights and sounds around me, I heard the cry of dogs and the sound of horns. But they were distant, and they passed away, and I went on, wandering slowly, with my horse's bridle hanging loosely over my arm, till suddenly I heard the sound of galloping hoofs; and, immediately after, down the little road in which I was ~~came~~ a gay wild horse of the Limousin, with a fair girl upon its back, who should hardly have been trusted to ride a fiery creature like that. She was not, indeed, a mere child, being apparently some sixteen or seventeen years of age; but extreme youth was in every feature and in every line, and, I might add, beauty also, for never in my life did I behold such visionlike loveliness as hers. The horse, with some sudden fright, must have darted away while she had laid down the rein; for, at the time I met her, though not broken, it was floating at his feet, hazarding at every instant to throw him down. She sat firmly in the seat, and rode with grace and ease; but she was evidently much frightened, and, as soon as she saw some one before her in the lane, she pointed with an eager gesture to the rein, and uttered some words which I did not hear. I easily divined her meaning, however, and turning my own horse loose, knowing I could catch him again in a moment, I snatched at the rein of her horse as he passed, ran for a moment by its side so as not to check it too sharply, then brought it to a halt, and asked her if she would alight. She bowed her head gracefully, and smiled most sweetly, replying, as soon as she could find breath, with many thanks for the service I had rendered her, that she was not hurt, and but a little frightened, the horse having darted away while she had laid

down the rein to put on her gloves. She would not alight, she said, but must return quickly to her friends, who would be frightened; and, without saying more, she again gracefully bent her head, turned her horse, and cantered rapidly away. I saw her once afterward, passing along with a gay cortège, composed of persons that I did not know. As we passed each other she recognised me instantly, and, with a heightened colour, noticed me by another marked inclination of the head. When I had passed on, I could judge by her own gestures and those of the persons around her that she was telling them what had occurred, and explaining to them the sign of recognition which she had made. On this second occasion she seemed to my eyes even more lovely than before. Her voice, too, though I had heard it so little, was the most musical that ever spoke to the heart of man; and I pondered and thought over the vision of loveliness that I had just seen, till it took so strong a hold of my heart and my imagination that I could not rest satisfied without seeking to behold it again. I rode through all the country round; I was every day, and almost all day, on horseback; I called at every neighbouring house; I inquired at every place where I was likely to meet with information, but I could never see, or speak with, or hear of that fair creature again, and the time came rapidly on when I was compelled to rejoin the army. I thought of her often, however; I have thought of her ever since; that lovely face, that sweet voice will never go from my mind, and reason and fancy combine to make me resolve never to wed any one that I do not think as lovely as herself."

"Pray what share had reason," demanded the chevalier, "in a business altogether so unreasonable? Poo! my dear Albert, you have worked yourself into a boyish fancy of love, and then have clung to it, I suppose, as the last bit of boyhood left about you. What had reason to do with your seeing a pretty girl in a dark lane, and fancying there was nothing like her upon earth?"

"With that, nothing certainly," replied the count, "but with my after-determination much. Long before that time I had begun to school myself a good deal on account of a propensity not so much to fall in love, but, as you term it, Louis, to make love to every fair crea-

ture I met with. I had found it needful to put some check upon myself; and, if an artificial one was to be chosen, I did not see why this should not be selected as well as any other. I determined that, as the knights of old, and our own troubadours too, if you will, and even—as by your laughing I suppose you would have it—excellent Don Quixote himself, that pattern of all true gentlemen, vowed and dedicated themselves to some fair lady, whom they had seen even less frequently than I had her; I determined, I say, that I would encourage this fancy of loving my fair horsewoman, and would employ the image of beauty which imagination, perhaps, had its share in framing, and the fine qualities of the mind and heart which were shadowed out beneath that lovely exterior, as a test, a touchstone whereby to try and to correct my feelings towards others, and to approach none with words of love who did not appear to me as beautiful in form as she was, and who did not seem, at least, equal to the standard which fancy had raised up under her image. The matter, perhaps, was carried farther than I intended; the feeling became more intense than I had expected. For some time I sincerely and truly fancied myself in love; but even since reason has come to my aid in such a matter, and I know how much imagination has to do with the whole, yet from that one circumstance, from that fanciful accident, my standard of perfection in woman has been raised so high, that I find none who have attained it; and yet so habitual has it become with me to apply it to every one I see, that, whenever I am introduced to any beautiful creature, to whom I might otherwise become attached, the fanciful image rises up, and the new acquaintance is tried and ever is found wanting.”

“Thou art a strange composition, my good friend the count,” said the chevalier; “but we shall see, now that peace and tranquillity have fallen over the world, whether you can go on, still resisting with the courage of a martyr. I don’t believe a word of it, although, to say sooth, your quality of heretic is something in your favour. But, in the name of fortune, tell me what are all those loud and tumultuous sounds which are borne by the wind through the open window. Your good people of Morseiul are not in rebellion, I hope.”

“Not that I know of,” replied the count, with a smile

at the very idea of such a thing as rebellion under Louis XIV.; "but I will call my fellow Riquet, who ought, I think, to have been called Scapin, for I am sure Molière must have had a presentiment of the approaching birth of such a scoundrel. He will tell us all about it; for if a thing takes place on the other side of the earth, Riquet knows it all within five minutes after it happens."

Before he had well finished speaking, the person he alluded to entered. But Riquet deserves a pause for separate notice.

CHAPTER II.

THE VALET—THE TOWNSPEOPLE—THE PROCLAMATION.

THE personage who entered the room, which, on that the first actual day after his arrival at his own dwelling, the Count de Morseiul had used as a dining-room, was the representative of an extinct race, combining in his own person all the faults and absurdities, with all the talents and even virtues which were sometimes mingled together in that strange composition, the old French valet. It is a creature that we find recorded in the pages of many an antique play, now either banished altogether from the stage or very seldom acted; but, alas! the being itself is extinct; and even were we to find a fossil specimen in some unexplored bed of blue clay, we should gain but a very inadequate idea of all its various properties and movements. We have still the roguish valet in sad abundance—a sort of common house-rat; and we have, moreover, the sly and the silent, the loquacious and the lying, the pilfering and the impudent valet, with a thousand other varieties; but the old French valet, that mithridatic compound of many curious essences, is no longer upon the earth, having gone absolutely out of date and being at the same period with his famous contemporary "*le marquis*."

At the time we speak of, however, the French valet was in full perfection; and, as we have said, an epitome of the whole race and class was to be found in

Maitre Jerome Riquet, who now entered the room, and advanced with an operative step towards his lord. He was a man, perhaps, of forty years of age, which, as experience and constant practice were absolute requisites in his profession, was a great advantage to him, for he had lost not one particle of the activity of youth, seeming to possess either a power of ubiquity, or a rapidity of locomotion which rendered applicable to him the famous description of the bird which flew so fast "as to be in two places at once." Quicksilver, or a lover's hours of happiness, a swallow, or the wind, were as nothing when compared to his rapidity; and it is also to be remarked, that the rapidity of the mind went hand in hand with the rapidity of the body, enabling him to comprehend his master's orders before they were spoken, to answer a question before it was asked, and to determine, with unerring sagacity, by a single glance, whether it would be most for his interests or his purposes to understand or misunderstand the coming words before they were pronounced.

Riquet was slightly made, though by no means fulfilling the immortal caricature of the gates of Calais; but, when dressed in his own appropriate costume, he contrived to make himself look more meager than he really was, perhaps with a view of rendering his person less recognisable when, dressed in a suit of his master's clothes, with sundry additions and ornaments of his own device, he appeared enlarged, with false calves to his legs, and manifold paddings on his breast and shoulders, enacting with great success the part of the Marquis of Kerousac, or of any other place which he chose to raise into the dignity of a marquisate for his own especial use.

His features, it is true, were so peculiar in their cast and expression, that it would have seemed, at first sight, utterly impossible for the face of Jerome Riquet to be taken for any other thing upon the earth than the face of Jerome Riquet. The figure thereof was long, and the jaws of the form called lantern, with high cheekbones, and a forehead so covered with protuberances that it seemed made on purpose for the demonstration of phrenology. Along this forehead, in almost a straight line, drawn from a point immediately between the eyes, at a very acute angle towards the zenith, were a pair of eyebrows, strongly marked throughout their whole

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course, but decorated by an obtrusive tuft near the nose, from which tuft now stuck out several long gray bristles. The eyes themselves were sharp, small, and brilliant; but, being under the especial protection of the superincumbent eyebrows, they followed the same line, leaving a long lean cheek on either side, only relieved by a congregation of radiating wrinkles at the corners of the eyelids. The mouth was as wide as any man could well desire for the ordinary purposes of life, and it was low down, too, in the face, leaving plenty of room for the nose above, which was as peculiar in its construction as any that ever was brought from "the promontory of noses." It was neither the Judaical hook nose, nor the pure aquiline, nor the semi-Judaical Italian, nor the vulture, nor the sheep, nor the horse nose. It had no affinity whatever to the "*nez retroussé*," nor was it the bottle, nor the ace of clubs. It was a nose *sui generis*; and, starting from between the two bushy eyebrows, it made its way out, with a slight parabolic curve downward, till it had reached about the distance of an inch and a half from the fundamental base-line of the face. Having attained that elevation, it came to a sharp abrupt point, through the thin skin of which the white gristle seemed inclined to force its way; and then, suddenly dropping a perpendicular, it joined itself on to the lower part of the face, at a right angle with the upper lip, with the extensive territories of which it did not interfere in the slightest degree, being, as it were, a thing apart, while the nostrils started up again, running in the same line as the eyes and eyebrows.

Such, in personal appearance, was Jerome Riquet, and his mental conformation was not at all less singular. Of this mental conformation we shall have to give some illustrations hereafter; but yet, to deal fairly by him, we must afford some sketch of his inner man in juxtaposition with his corporeal qualities. In the first place, without the reality of being a coward, he affected cowardice as a very convenient reputation, which might be serviceable on many occasions, and could be shaken off whenever he thought fit. "A brave man," he said, "has something to keep up; he must never be cowardly; but a poltron can be a brave man, without derogating from a well-earned reputation, when he pleases. No, no, I like variety; I'll be a coward, and a brave man only when it suits me." He sometimes, indeed, nearly

betrayed himself by burlesquing fear, especially when any raw soldier was near; for he had an invincible inclination to amuse himself with the weaknesses of others, and knew how contagious a disease fear is.

The next remarkable trait in his character was a mixture of honesty and roguery, which left him many doubts in his own mind as to whether he was by nature a knave or a simpleton. He would pilfer from his master anything he could lay his hands upon, if he thought his master did not really want it; but, had that master fallen into difficulties or dangers, he would have given him his last louis, or laid down his life to save him. He would pick the locks of a cabinet to see what it contained, and ingeniously turn the best-folded letter inside out to read the contents; but no power on earth would ever have made him divulge to others that which he practised such unjustifiable means to learn.

He was also a most determined liar, both by habit and inclination. He preferred it, he said, to truth. It evinced greater powers of the human mind. Telling truth, he said, only required the use of one's tongue and one's memory; but to lie, and to lie well, demanded imagination, judgment, courage, and, in short, all the higher qualities of the human intellect. He could sometimes, however, tell the truth, when he saw that it was absolutely necessary. All that he had was a disposition to falsehood, controllable under particular circumstances, but always returning when those circumstances were removed.

As to the religion of Maître Jerome Riquet, the less that is said upon the matter the better for the honour of that individual. He had but one sense of religion, indeed, and his definition of religion will give that sense its clearest exposition. In explaining his views one day on the subject to a fellow-valet, he was known to declare that religion consisted in expressing those opinions concerning what was within a man's body, and what was to become of it after death, which were most likely to be beneficial to that body in the circumstances in which it was placed. Now, to say the truth, in order to act in accordance with this definition, Maître Jerome had a difficult part to perform. His parents and relations were all Catholics; and having been introduced at an early age into the house of a Huguenot nobleman, and attached for many years to the person

of his son, with only one other Catholic in the household, it would seem to have been the natural course of policy for the valet, under his liberal view of things, to abandon Catholicism, and betake himself to the pleasant heresy of his masters. But Riquet had a more extensive conception of things than that. He saw and knew that Catholicism was the great predominant religion of the country ; he knew that it was the predominant religion of the court also ; and he had a sort of instinctive foresight from the beginning of the persecutions and severities, the dark clouds of which were now gathering fast around the Huguenots, and were likely sooner or later to overwhelm them.

Now, like the famous Erasmus, Jerome Riquet had no will to be made a martyr of ; and though he could live very comfortably in a Huguenot family, and attach himself to its lords, he did not think it at all necessary to attach himself to its religion also ; but, on the contrary, went to mass when he had nothing else to do ; confessed what sins he thought fit to acknowledge or to invent once every four or five years ; swore that he performed all the penances assigned to him, and tormented the Protestant maidservants of the chateau by vowing that they were all destined to eternal condemnation ; that there was not a nook in purgatory hot enough to bake away their sins ; and that a place was reserved for them in the bottomless pit itself, with Arians and Socinians, and all the heretics and heresiarchs from the beginning of the world. After having given way to one of these tirades, he would generally burst into a loud fit of laughter at the absurdity of all religious contentions, and run away leaving his fellow-servants with a full conviction that he had no religion at all.

He dared not, it is true, indulge in such licenses towards his master ; but he very well knew that the young count was not a bigot himself, and would not, by any means, think that he served him better if he changed his religion. In times of persecution and danger, indeed, the count might have imagined that there was a risk of a very zealous Catholic being induced to injure or betray his Protestant lord ; but the count well knew Jerome to be anything but a zealous Catholic, and he had not the slightest fear that any hatred of Protestantism or love for the Church of Rome would ever induce

the worthy valet to do anything against the lord to whom he had attached himself.

Such, then, was Jerome Riquet; and we shall pause no longer upon his other characteristic qualities than to say that he was the exemplification of the word clever; that there was scarcely anything to which he could not turn his hand; and that, though light, and lying, and pilfering, and impudent beyond all impudence, he was capable of strong attachments and warm affections; and, if we may use a very colloquial expression to characterize his proceedings, there was fully as much fun as malice in his roguery. A love of adventure and of jest was his predominant passion; and although all the good things and consolations of this life by no means came amiss to him, yet, in the illegitimate means which he took to acquire them, he found a greater pleasure even than in their enjoyment when obtained.

When the door opened, as we have said, and Riquet presented himself, the eyes of the Count de Morseiul fixed upon him at once; and he immediately gathered, from the ludicrous expression of fear which the valet had contrived to throw into his face, that something of a serious nature had really happened in the town, though he doubted not that it was by no means sufficient to cause the astonishment and terror which Jerome affected. Before he could ask any questions, however, Jerome, advancing with the step of a ballet-master, cast himself on one knee at the count's feet, exclaiming,

"My lord, I come to you for protection and for safety."

"Why, what is the matter, Jerome?" exclaimed the count. "What rogue's trick have you been playing now? Is it a cudgel or the gallows that you fear?"

"Neither, my good lord," replied Jerome, "but it is the fagot and the stake. I fear the rage of your excited and insubordinate people in the town of Morseiul, who are now in a state of heretical insurrection, tearing down the king's proclamations, trampling his edicts under foot, and insulting his officers; and as I happen, I believe, to be the only Catholic in the place, I run the risk of being one of the first to be sacrificed, if their insane vehemence leads them into further acts of phrensy."

"Get up, fool, get up," cried the count, shaking him off as he clung to his knee; "tell me, if you can speak

truth and common sense, what is it you mean, and what has occasioned all these shouts that we heard just now?"

"I mean, my lord," said Riquet, starting up and putting himself in an attitude, "I mean all that I say. There is some proclamation," he continued, in a more natural tone, "concerning the performance of the true Catholic and apostolic religion, which some of the king's officers posted up on the gate at the bottom of the Count's street, and which the people instantly tore down. The huissier and the rest were proceeding up the street to read the edict in the great square, amid the shouts and imprecations of the vulgar; but I saw them gathering together stones, and bringing out cudgels, which showed me that harder arguments were about to be used than words; and as there is no knowing where such matters may end, I made haste to take care of my own poor innocent skin, and lay myself at your feet, humbly craving your protection."

"Then get out of my way," said the count, putting him on one side and moving towards the door. "Louis, we must go and see after this. This is some new attack upon us poor Huguenots; some other Jesuitical infraction of the privileges assured to us by our good King Henry IV. We must quiet the people, however, and see what the offence is; though, God help us," he added, with a sigh, "since the parliaments have succumbed, there is no legal means left us of obtaining redress. Some day or another these bad advisers of our noble and magnificent monarch will drive the Protestant part of his people into madness, or compel them to raise the standard of revolt against him, or to fly to other lands, and seek the exercise of their religion unoppressed."

"Hush, hush, hush, Morseiul," said his companion, laying his hand kindly on his arm; "your words are hasty. You do not know how small a matter constitutes treason nowadays, or how easy is the passage to the Bastile."

"Oh! I know, I know quite well," replied the count; "and that many a faithful and loyal subject, who has served his king and country well, has found his way there before me. I love and admire my king. I will serve him with my whole soul and the last drop of my blood, and all that I claim in return is that liberty of my own free thoughts which no man can take from me."

Chains cannot bind that down; Bastiles cannot shut it in; and every attempt to crush it is but an effort of tyranny both impotent and cruel. However, we must calm the people. Where is my hat, knave?"

"I have often wished, my dear Morseiul," said the chevalier, as they followed the valet, who ran on to get the count's hat: "I have often wished that you would give yourself a little time to think and to examine. I am very sure that, if you did, you would follow the example of the greatest man of modern times, abjure your religious errors, and gain the high station and renown which you so well deserve."

"What, do you mean Turenne?" exclaimed the count. "Never, Louis, never! I grant him, Louis, to have been one of the greatest men of this, or, perhaps, of any other age; mighty as a warrior, just, clear-sighted, kind-hearted, and comprehensive as a politician, and perhaps as great in the noble and honest simplicity of his nature as in any other point of view. I grant him all and everything that you could say in his favour. I grant everything that his most enthusiastic admirers can assert; but *God forbid that we should ever imitate the weakness of a great man's life*. No, no, chevalier, it is one of the most perverted uses of example to justify wrong because the good have been tempted to commit it. No man's example, no man's opinion to me is worth anything, however good or however wise he may be, if there be stamped upon its face the broad and unequivocal marks of wrong."

By this time they had reached the vestibule, from which a little flight of steps conducted into the garden, and Maître Jerome stood there with his lord's hat and polished cane in his hand. The count took them with a quick gesture, and passed on, followed by his friend, who raised his eyebrows a little with a look of regret as his only answer to his last words. These words had been heard by the valet also, and the raising of the eyebrows was not unmarked; and Maître Jerome, understanding the whole train of the argument as well as if he had heard every syllable, commented upon what he considered his lord's imbecility by a shrug of the shoulders, in which his head almost utterly disappeared.

In the mean time, the young count and his friend passed up the little avenue to the postern gate, opened it, and entered the town of Morseiul; and then, by a short and

narrow street, which was at that moment all in shadow, entered the market square, at which they arrived, by the shorter path they pursued, long before the officers who were about to read the proclamation. A great number of persons were collected in the square, and it was evident that by this time the whole place was in a state of great excitement. The chevalier was in some fear for the effect of the coming scene upon his friend; and, as they entered the market-place, he stopped him, laying his hand upon his arm, and saying,

"Morseiul, you are a good deal heated; pause for one moment and think of what you are about. For the sake of yourself and of your country, if not for mine, neither say nor do anything rashly."

The count turned towards him with a calm and gentle smile, and grasped his hand.

"Thank you, Louis," he said, "thank you, though your caution, believe me, is unnecessary. You will see that I act as calmly and as reasonably, that I speak as quietly and as peacefully, as the most earnest Catholic could desire. Heaven forbid," he added, "that I should say one word or make one allusion to anything that could farther excite the passions of the people than they are likely to be excited already. Civil strife, Louis, is the most awful of all things so long as it lasts, and seldom, very seldom, if ever, obtains the end for which it first commenced. But, even if I did not think so," he added, in a lower voice, "I know that the Protestants of France have no power to struggle with the force of the crown, unless—" and his voice fell almost to a whisper, "unless the crown force upon them the energetic vigour of despair."

The two had paused while they thus spoke; and while they heard the murmuring sounds of the people coming up the hill from the right hand, the noise of several persons running could be distinguished on the other side; and, turning round towards the postern, the count saw that, thanks to the care and foresight of Maître Jerome, a great number of his domestics and attendants were coming up at full speed to join him, so that, when he again advanced, he was accompanied by ten or twelve persons, ready to obey, without hesitation or difficulty, the slightest command that he should give. As there was no telling the turn which events might take, he was not sorry that it should be so; and as he now advanced

towards the centre of the square, the sight of his liveries instantly attracted the attention of the people, and he was recognised with joyful exclamations of "The Count! The Count!"

Gladness was in every face at his approach; for the minds of the populace were in that state of anxious hesitation, in which the presence and direction of any one to whom they are accustomed to look up is an absolute blessing. Taking off his hat and bowing repeatedly to every one around him, speaking to many, and recognising every one with whom he was personally acquainted with a frank and good-humoured smile, the count advanced through the people, who gathered upon his path as he proceeded, till he reached the top of the hill, and obtained a clear view of what was passing below.

Had not one known the painful and angry feelings which were then excited, it would have been a pleasant and a cheerful scene. The sun had by this time got sufficiently round to the westward to throw long shadows from the irregular gable-ended houses more than half way across the wide open road that conducted from the valley to the top of the hill. The perspective, too, was strongly marked by the lines of the buildings; the other side of the road was in bright light; there was a beautiful prospect of hill and dale seen out beyond the town; numerous booths and stalls, kept by peasant women with bright dresses and snowy caps, checkered the whole extent; and up the centre of the street, approaching slowly, were the officers of the district, with a small party of military, followed on either side by a much more considerable number of the lower order of town's people and peasantry.

Such was the scene upon which the eyes of the Count de Morseiul fell; and it must be admitted, that, when he saw the military, his heart beat with considerable feelings of indignation; for we must remember that, in towns like that which was under his rule, the feudal customs still existed to a very great extent. It was still called his town of Morseiul. The king, indeed, ruled; the laws of the land were administered in the king's name; but the custody, defence, and government of the town of Morseiul was absolutely in the hands of the count, or of the persons to whom he delegated his power during his absence. It was regularly, in fact,

garrisoned in his name; and there were many instances, scarcely twenty years before, in which the garrisons of such towns had resisted in arms the royal authority; and if not held to be fully justified, at all events had passed without punishment, because they were acting under the orders of him in whose name they were levied. The attempt, therefore, of any body of the king's troops to penetrate into the count's town of Morseiul, without his having been formally deprived of the command thereof, seemed to him one of the most outrageous violations of his privileges which it was possible to imagine; and his heart consequently beat, as we have said, with feelings of high indignation. He suppressed them, however, with the calm determination of doing what was right; and turned to gaze upon the people who surrounded him, in order to ascertain, as far as possible, by what feelings they were affected.

His own attendants had congregated immediately behind him; on his right hand stood his friend the cavalier; on his left, about half a step behind, so as to be near the count, but not to appear obtrusive, was a personage of considerable importance in the little town of Morseiul, though he exercised a handicraft employment, and worked daily with his own hands, even while he directed others. This was Paul Virlay, the principal blacksmith of the place. He was at this time a man of about fifty years of age, tall, and Herculean in all his proportions. The small head, the broad muscular chest and shoulders, the brawny arms, the immense thick hands, the thin flanks, and the stout legs and thighs, all bespoke extraordinary strength. He was very dark in complexion, with a short-cut, curly black hair, grizzled with gray; and the features of his face, though short and by no means handsome, had a good and a frank expression, but at all times somewhat stern.

At the present moment his brow was more contracted than usual; not that there was any other particular mark of very strongly excited passions upon his countenance; and the attitude he had assumed was one of calm and reposing strength, resting with his right hand supported by one of the common quarter-staffs of the country, a full inch and a half thick, much in the same position which he frequently assumed when, pausing in his toil, he talked with his workmen, leaving the sledge-hammer, that usually descended with such awful strength,

to support the hand which wielded it at other times like a feather.

Behind him, again, was a great multitude of the town's people of different classes, though the mayor and the municipal officers had thought fit to absent themselves carefully from the scene of probable strife. But the eyes of the count fell, as we have said, upon Paul Virlay; and knowing him to be a man both highly respected in his own class, and of considerable wealth and importance in the city, he addressed him in the first instance, saying,

"Good-morrow, Virlay; it is long since I have seen you all. What is all this about?"

"You don't forget us, Count Albert, even when you are away," replied the blacksmith, with his brow unbending. "We know that very well, and have proofs of it too, when anything good is to be done; but this seems to me to be a bad business. We hear that the king has suppressed the chamber of the edict, which was our greatest safeguard; and now my boy tells me, for I sent him down to see when they first came to the bottom of the hill, that this is a proclamation forbidding us from holding synods; and be you sure, sir, that the time is not far distant when they will try to stop us altogether from worshipping God in our own way. What think you, my lord?" he said, in a lower tone, "were it not better to show them at once that they cannot go on?" and his looks spoke much more than even his words.

"No, Virlay," replied the count; "no, by no means. You see the people are in tumult below evidently. Any unadvised and illegal resistance to the royal authority will immediately call upon us harsh measures, and be made the pretext by any bad advisers who may surround the king for irritating his royal mind against us. Let us hear what the proclamation really is; even should it be harsh and unjust, which, from the king's merciful nature, we will hope is not the case: let us listen to it calmly and peaceably, and, after having considered well, and taken the advice and opinion of wise and experienced men, let us then make what representations to the king we may think fit, and petition him, in his clemency, to do us right."

"Clemency!" said the blacksmith. "However, my lord, you know better than I; but I hope that they will not say anything to make our blood boil, that's all."

"Even if they should," replied the count, "we must prevent it from boiling over. Virlay, I rely upon you, as one of the most sensible men in the place, not only to restrain yourself, but to aid me in restraining others. The king has every right to send his own officers to make his will known to his people."

"But the dragoons," said Virlay, fixing his eyes upon the soldiers; "what business have they here? Why, they might, Count Albert—"

The count stopped him.

"They are yet without the real bounds of the town, Virlay," he said; "and they do not enter into it! Send some one you can trust for the mayor with all speed; unhook the gates from the bars that keep them back: place a couple of men behind each; I will prevent the military from entering into the town: but I trust to you, and the other men of good sense who surround me, to guard the king's officers and the king's authority from any insult, and to suffer the proclamation of his will to take place in the market-place without any opposition or tumult whatsoever."

"I will do my best, count," replied the blacksmith, "for I am sure you are a true friend to us; and we may well trust in you."

The crowd from below had in the mean time advanced steadily up the hill, surrounding the officers of the crown and the soldiery; and by this time the whole mass was within a hundred and fifty yards of the spot where the count and his companions stood. Their progress had been without violence, indeed, but not without hootings and outcry, which seemed greatly to annoy the officer in command of the soldiers, he having been accustomed alone to the court of the grand monarch, and to the scenes in the neighbourhood of the capital, where the people might well be said to lick the dust beneath the feet of their pageant-loving king. It seemed, then, something so strange and monstrous to his ears, that any expression of the royal will should be received otherwise than with the most deep and devoted submission, that he was more than once tempted to turn and charge the multitude. A prudent consideration, however, of the numbers by which he was surrounded, and the scantiness of his own band, overcame all such purposes; and, though foaming with indignation, he continued to advance, without noticing the

shouts that assailed him, and playing with the manifold ribands and pieces of silk that decorated his buff coat and his swordknot to conceal his vexation and annoyance.

"Who have we here at the head of them?" demanded the count, turning to the chevalier. "His face is not unknown to me."

"As far as I can see," replied his companion, "it is young Hericourt, a nephew of Le Tellier's; do you not remember? as brave as a lion, but, moreover, a young coxcomb, who thinks that he can do everything, and that nothing can be done without him; as stupid as an owl too. I wonder you do not recollect his getting great credit for taking the little fort of the *bec de l'oie* by a sheer act of stupidity; getting himself and his party entangled between the two forts, and, while Lamets was advancing to extricate him, forcing his way in, from not knowing what else to do."

"I remember, I remember," said the count, with a smile; "he was well rewarded for his fortunate mistake. But what does he here, I wonder? I thought he never quitted the precincts of Versailles but to follow the king to the camp."

"He is the worst person who could have been sent upon this errand," replied the chevalier; "for he is certain to make mischief wherever he goes. He has attached himself much to the Rouvres, however, of late, and I suppose Le Tellier has given him some post about the new governor, in order that his rule may not be the most tranquil in the world."

While they were speaking, the eyes of the people who were coming up the hill fell upon the group that had assembled just in front of the gates, with the count, his friend, and his servants in the foreground; and immediately a loud shout made itself heard, of "The count! the count! Long live the count!" followed by various other exclamations, such as "He will protect us! Long live our own good count!"

The moment that the count's name was thus loudly pronounced, the young officer, turning to those who followed, gave some orders in a low voice, and then, spurring on his horse through the crowd, rode directly up to the Count de Morseuil; who, as he saw him approaching, turned to the chevalier, saying, "You bear witness,

Louis, that I deal with this matter as moderately and loyally as may be."

"I trust, for the sake of all," said the chevalier, "that you will. You know, Albert, that I do not care two straws for one religion more than the other; and think that a man can serve God singing the psalms of Clement Marot as well, or, perhaps, better, than if he sung them in Latin, without, perhaps, understanding them. But, for Heaven's sake, keep peace in the inside of the country at all events. But here comes our young dragoon."

As he spoke, the young officer rode up with a good deal of irritation evident in his countenance. He seemed to be three or four-and-twenty years of age, of a complexion extremely fair, and with a countenance sufficiently unmeaning, though all the features were good. He bowed familiarly to the chevalier, and more distantly to the Count de Morseuil; but addressed himself at once to the latter:

"I have the honour," he said, "I presume, of speaking to the Count de Morseuil; and I must say that I hope he will give me his aid in causing proclamation of the king's will among these mutinous and rebellious people of his town of Morseuil."

"My friend the chevalier here tells me," replied the count, "that I have the honour of seeing Monsieur de Hericourt—"

"The Marquis Auguste de Hericourt," interrupted the young officer.

"Well, sir, well," said the count, somewhat impatiently, "I stand corrected: the Marquis Auguste de Hericourt; and I am very happy to have the honour of seeing him, and also to inform him that I will myself ensure that the king's will is, as he says, proclaimed in my town of Morseuil by the proper officers, taking care to accompany them into the town myself for that purpose, although I cannot but defend my poor townsmen from the accusation of being mutinous and rebellious subjects, nothing being farther from the thoughts of any one here present than mutiny or rebellion."

"Do you not hear the cries and shouts?" cried the young officer. "Do you not see the threatening aspect of the people?"

"I hear some shouts, certainly," answered the count, "as if something had given offence or displeasure; but what it is I do not know. I trust and hope that it is

nothing in any proclamation of the king's; and if I should find it to be so, when I hear the proclamation read, I shall take every means to put an end to such demonstrations of disappointment or grief at once. We have always the means of approaching the royal ear, and I feel sure that there will be no occasion for clamour or outcry in order to obtain justice at the hands of our most gracious and wise monarch. But allow me to observe, Monsieur le Marquis," he continued, somewhat more quickly, "your dragoons are approaching rather too near the gates of Morseiul."

"You do not intend, I presume, sir," said the young officer, sharply, "to refuse an entrance to the officers of the king, charged with a proclamation from his majesty!"

"Not to the king's proper civil officers," replied the count, keeping his eye, while he spoke, warily fixed upon the dragoons. "But, most assuredly, I do intend to refuse admittance to any body of military whatsoever, great or small, while I retain the post with which his majesty has intrusted me of governor to this place."

There was a pause for a single instant, and the young officer turned his head, without replying, towards the soldiers, on whom the count's eye also was still fixed. There was something, however, suspicious in their movements. They had now reached the brow of the hill, and were within twenty yards of the gate. They formed into a double file as they came up in front of the civil officers, and the head man of each file was seen passing a word to those behind him. At the moment their officer turned his head towards them, they began to move forward in quicker time, and in a moment more would have passed the gates; but at that instant the clear, full voice of the Count de Morseiul was heard exclaiming, in a tone that rose above all the rest of the sounds,

"Close the gates!" and the two ponderous masses of wood, which had not been shut for many years, swung forward, grating on their hinges, and at once barred all entrance into the town.

"What is the meaning of this, Monsieur de Hericourt?" continued the count. "Your men deserve a severe reprimand, sir, for attempting to enter the town without my permission or your orders."

The young man turned very red, but he was not ready with a reply; and the chevalier, willing, as far as possible, to prevent any unpleasant consequences, and yet not to lose a jest, exclaimed,

"I suppose the marquis took it for the bec de l'oie; but he is mistaken, you see."

"He might have found it a trap for a goose, if not a goose's bill," said a loud voice from behind; but the marquis either did not or would not hear anything but the pleasant part of the allusion, and, bowing to the chevalier with a smile, he said, "Oh, you are too good, Monsieur le Chevalier; the affair you mention was but a trifle, far more owing to the courage of my men than to any skill on my part. But, in the present instance, I must say, count," he added, turning towards the other, "that the king's officers must be admitted to make proclamations in the town of Morseuil."

"The king's civil officers shall, sir," replied the count, "as I informed you before: but no soldiers, on any pretence whatsoever. However, sir," he continued, seeing the young officer mustering up a superabundant degree of energy, "I think it will be much the best plan for you to do me the honour of reposing yourself, with any two or three of your attendants you may think fit, at my poor chateau here, without the walls, while your troopers can refresh themselves at the little auberge at the foot of the hill. My friend, the chevalier here, will do the honours of my house till I return, and I will accompany the officers charged with the proclamation, and see that they meet with no obstruction in the fulfilment of their duty."

"I do not know that I am justified," said the young officer, hesitating, "in not insisting upon seeing the proclamation made myself."

"I am afraid there will be no use of insisting," replied the count; "and, depend upon it, sir, you will serve the king better by suffering the proclamation to be made quietly, than even by risking a disturbance by protracting, unnecessarily, an irritating discussion. I wish to treat you with all respect, and with the distinction due to your high merit. Farther, I have nothing to say but that I am governor of Morseuil, and, as such, undertake to see the king's proclamation duly made within the walls."

The hesitation of the young dragoon was only in-

creased by the cool and determined tone of the count. Murmurs were rising among the people round, and the voice of Paul Virlay was heard muttering,

"He had better decide quickly, or we shall not be able to keep the good men quiet."

The marquis heard the words, and instantly began to bristle up, to fix himself more firmly in the saddle, and put his hand towards the hilt of his sword; but the chevalier advanced close to his side, and spoke to him for a moment or two in a low voice. Nothing was heard of their conversation, even by the Count de Morseiul, but the words "good wine—pleasant evening—laugh over the whole affair."

But at length the young courtier bowed his head to the count, saying, "Well, then, sir, I repose the trust in you, knowing you to be a man of such high honour that you would not undertake what you could not perform, nor fail to execute punctually that which you had undertaken. I will do myself the honour of waiting your return, with the chevalier, at your chateau."

After some further words of civility on both parts, the young officer dismounted and threw his rein to a page; and then, formally placing the civil officers under the care and protection of the Count de Morseiul, he gave orders to his dragoons to bend their steps down the hill, and refresh themselves at the auberge below; while he, bowing again to the count, took his way with the chevalier and a single attendant along the esplanade which led to the gates of the chateau without the walls. The civil officers, who had certainly been somewhat maltreated as they came up the hill, seemed not a little unwilling to see the dragoons depart, and a loud shout, mingled of triumph and scorn, with which the people treated the soldiers as they turned to march down the hill, certainly did not at all tend to comfort or reassure the poor huissiers, greffiers, and other officers. The shout caused the young marquis, who had proceeded twenty or thirty steps upon his way, to stop short and turn round, imagining that some new collision had taken place between the town's people and the rest; but, seeing that all was quiet, he walked on again the moment after, and the count, causing the civil officers to be surrounded by his own attendants, ordered the wicket to be opened, and led the way in, calling to Virlay to accompany him, and urging upon him the necessity of

preserving peace and order, let the nature of the proclamation be what it might.

"I have given you my promise, count," replied the blacksmith, "to do my best, and I won't fail; but I won't answer for myself or others on any other occasion."

"We are only speaking of the present," replied the count; "for other occasions other measures, as the case may be: but, at present, everything requires us to submit without any opposition. Where can this cowardly mayor be," he said, "that he does not choose to show himself in a matter like this? But the proclamation must be made without him if he do not appear."

They had by this time advanced into the midst of the great square, and the count signified to the officer charged with the proclamation that it had better be made at once: but, for some moments, what he suggested could not be accomplished from the pressure of the people, the crowd amounting by this time to many hundred persons. The count, his attendants, and Virlay, however, contrived, with some difficulty, to clear a little space around, the first by entreaties and expostulations, and the blacksmith by sundry thrusts of his strong quarter staff and menaces, with an arm which few of those there present seemed inclined to encounter.

The count then took off his hat, and the officer began to read the proclamation, which was long and wordy; but which, like many an other act of the crown then taking place from day to day, had a direct tendency to deprive the Protestants of France of the privileges which had been secured to them by Henry IV. Among other galling and unjust decrees here announced to the people was one which—after stating that many persons of the religion affecting the title of *reformed*, being ill-disposed towards the king's government, were selling their landed property with the view of emigrating to other lands—went on to declare and to give warning to all purchasers, that if heretical persons affecting such sales did quit the country within one year after having sold their property, the whole would be considered as confiscated to the state, and that the purchasers would receive no indemnity.

When this part of the proclamation was read, the eyes of the sturdy blacksmith turned upon the count, who,

by a gesture of the hand, endeavoured to suppress all signs of disapprobation among the multitude. It was in vain, however; for a loud shout of indignation burst forth from them, which was followed by another when the proclamation went on to declare that the mayors of towns, professing the Protestant faith, should be deprived of the rank of nobles, which had been formerly granted to them. The proclamation then proceeded with various other notices of the same kind, and the indignation of the people was loud and unrestrained. The presence of the count, however, and the exertions of Virlay and several influential people, who were opposed to rash collision with the authority of the king, prevented any act of violence from being committed; and, when the whole ceremony was complete, the officers were led back to the gates by the count, who gave orders that they should be conducted in safety beyond the precincts of the place by his own attendants.

After returning into the great square, and holding a momentary conversation with some of the principal persons present, he returned by the postern to his own abode, where he found his friend and the young officer, apparently forgetting altogether the unpleasant events of the morning, and laughing and talking gayly over indifferent subjects.

"I have the pleasure of informing you, Monsieur de Hericourt," said the count, when he appeared, "that the proclamation has been made without interruption, and that the king's officers have been conducted out of the town in safety. We have therefore nothing more of an unpleasant kind to discuss, and I trust that you will take some refreshment."

Wine, and various sorts of meats, which were considered as delicacies in those days, were brought and set before the young courtier, who did justice to all, declaring that he had never in his life tasted anything more exquisite than the produce of the count's cellars. He even ventured to praise his dishes, though he insinuated, much to the indignation of the cook, to whom it was repeated by an attendant, that there was a shade too much of taragon in one of the ragouts; and that, if a matelotte had been five minutes more cooked, the fish would have been tenderer, and the flavour more decided. The count smiled and apologized for the error, reminding him that the poor rustics in the country could

not boast the skill and delicacy, or even, perhaps, the nicety of natural taste of the artists of the capital. He then turned the conversation to matters of some greater importance, and inquired when they were to expect the presence of the Duc de Rouvré in the province.

The young marquis opened his eyes at the question, as if he looked upon it as a sign of the most utter and perfect ignorance and rusticity that could be conceived.

"Is it possible, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "that you, so high in the service of the king, and so highly esteemed, as I may add, at court, are not aware that the duke arrived at Poitiers nearly five days ago? I had the honour of accompanying him thither, and he has himself been within the last three days as near as seven leagues to the very place where we are now sitting."

"You must remember, my good sir," replied the count, "as some excuse for my ignorance, that I received his majesty's gracious permission to return hither upon some important affairs direct from the army, without visiting the court, and that I only arrived late last night. Pray, when you return to Monsieur de Rouvré, present my compliments to him, and tell him that I shall do myself the honour of waiting upon him, to congratulate him and the duchess upon their safe arrival in the province, without any delay."

"Wait till they are fully established at Poitiers," replied the young officer. "They are now upon a little tour through the province, not choosing to stay at Poitiers yet," he added, sinking his voice into a low and confidential tone, "because their household is not in complete order. None of the new liveries are made; the guard of the governor is not yet recognised; two cooks and three servers have not arrived from Paris. Nothing is in order, in short. In a week, I trust, we shall be more complete, and then, indeed, I do not think that the household of any governor in the kingdom will exceed in taste, if not in splendour, that of the Duc de Rouvré."

"Which is, I presume," said the chevalier, "under the direction and superintendence of the refined and celebrated good taste of the Marquis Auguste de Hericourt."

"Why, to say the truth," replied the young nobleman, "my excellent friend De Rouvré has some confidence in my judgment of such things; I may say, in-

deed, has implicit faith therein, as he has given all that department over to me for the time, beseeching me to undertake it; and, of course, I cannot disappoint him."

"Of course not! of course not!" replied the chevalier, and in such conversation passed on some time, the worthy Marquis de Hericourt, swallowed up in himself, not at all perceiving a certain degree of impatience in the Count de Morseuil, which might have afforded any other man a hint to take his departure. He lingered over his wine; he lingered over his dessert; he perambulated the gardens; he criticised the various arrangements of the chateau with that minute attention to nothings which is the most insufferable of all things when obtruded upon a mind bent upon matters of deep importance.

It was thus fully five o'clock in the afternoon before he took his departure, and the count forced himself to perform every act of civility by him to the last moment. As soon as he was gone, however, the young nobleman turned quickly to his friend, saying,

"I thought that contemptible piece of emptiness would never depart; and of course, Louis, after what has taken place this morning, it is absolutely necessary for me to consult with some of my friends of the same creed as myself. I will not in any degree involve you in these matters, as the very fact of your knowing any of our proceedings might hereafter be detrimental to you; and I only make this excuse because I owe it to the long friendship between us not to withhold any part of my confidence from you, except out of consideration for yourself."

"Act as you think fit, my dear Albert," replied his friend; "but only act with moderation. If you want my advice on any occasion, ask it, without minding whether you compromise me or not; I'm quite sure that I am much too bad a Catholic to sacrifice my friend's secrets either to Pellisson, La Chaise, or Le Tellier. If I am not mistaken, the devil himself will make the fourth at their cardtable some day, and perhaps Louvois will stand by and bet."

"Oh! I entertain no fear of your betraying me," answered the count, with a smile; "but I should entertain great fear of embroiling you with the court."

"Only take care not to embroil yourself," replied the chevalier. "I am sure I wish there were no such thing

as sects in the world. If you could but take a glance at the state of England, which is split into more sects than it contains cities, I am sure you would be of Turenne's opinion, and come into the bosom of the mother church, if it were but for the sake of getting rid of such confusion. Nay, shake not your wise head. If the truth be told, you are Protestant because you were bred so in your youth; and one half of the world has no other motive either for its religion or its politics. But get thee gone, Albert, get thee gone. Consult with your wise friends, and come back more Huguenotized than ever."

The count would have made some further apologies for leaving him, but his friend would not hear them; and sending for his horse, Albert of Morseilul took his departure from his chateau, forbidding any of his attendants to follow him.

CHAPTER III.

THE PASTOR.

THE count's orders were given so distinctly for no one to accompany him on his way, that none of his domestics presumed even to gaze after him from the gate, or to mark the path he took. As he wished to call no attention, he kept under the walls of the town, riding slowly along over the green till he came to the zigzag path which we have before mentioned as being now almost entirely disused. He had cast a large cloak around him, of that kind which at an after period degenerated into what was called a roquelaure, and his person was thus sufficiently concealed to prevent him from being recognised by anybody at a distance.

At the foot of the zigzag which he now descended, he chose a path which led along the bank of the river for some way to the right, and then entered into a beautiful wooded lane between high banks. The sun was shining full over the world, but with a tempered and gentle light from the point of its declination at which it had arrived. The rays, however, did not, in general, reach the road, except where the bank sloped away;

and then, pouring through the green leaves and branches of the wild briar, the honeysuckle, and the hazel, it streamed upon the miniature cliffs of yellow sand on the opposite side, and checkered the uneven path which the young count was pursuing. The birds had, as yet, lost little of their full song; and the deep round tones of the blackbird, bidding the golden day adieu as he saw the great light-bearer descending in the heavens, poured forth from beneath the holly-bushes, with a melancholy and moralizing sound, speaking to the heart of man with the grand philosophic voice of nature, and counselling peace, and affection, and meditation on the bounties of God.

It is impossible to ride through such scenes at such an hour on the evening of bright summer days without feeling the calm and elevating influence of all things, whether mute or tuneful, taught by almighty beneficence to celebrate either by aspect or by song the close of another day's being and enjoyment. The effect upon the heart of the Count de Morseiul was full and deep. He had been riding slowly before; but, after passing through the lane for about a minute, he gently drew in the bridle upon his horse till the beast went slower still, then laid the rein quietly upon his neck, and gave himself up to meditation.

The chief theme in his mind at that moment was certainly the state and prospects of himself and his fellow Protestants; and perhaps—even in experiencing all the beauty and the peacefulness of the scene through which he wandered, the calm tone of enjoyment in everything around, the voice of tranquillity that spoke in every sound—his feelings towards those who unnecessarily disturbed the contented existence of an industrious and happy race might become bitter, and his indignation grow more deep and stern, though more melancholy and tranquil. What had the Huguenots done, he asked himself, for persecution to seek them out there in the midst of their calm and pleasant dwellings; to fill them with fiery passions that they knew not of before; to drive them to acts which they as well as their enemies might bitterly repent at an after period; and to mar scenes which seemed destined for the purest and happiest enjoyment that the nature of man, and its harmony with the other works of God, can produce, by anxiety, care, strife, and, perhaps, with bloodshed?

What had the Huguenots done ? he asked himself. Had they not served their king as loyally, as valiantly, as readily in the battle-field and upon the wide ocean as the most zealous Catholic among them all ? Had not the most splendid victories which his arms had obtained by land been won for him by Huguenot generals ? Was not even then a Huguenot seaman carrying the thunders of his navy into the ports of Spain ? Were the Huguenots less loyal subjects, less industrious mechanics, less estimable as citizens, than any other of the natives of the land ? Far from it. The contrary was known to be the fact ; the decided contrary. They were more peaceable, they were more tranquil, they were more industrious, they were more ready to contribute either their blood or their treasure to the service of the state than the great mass of the Catholic population ; and yet tormenting exactions, insults, cavillings, inquiries, and investigations, all tending to irritate and enrage, were going on day by day, and were clearly to be followed soon by the persecuting sword itself.

On such themes he paused and thought as he went on, and the first effect produced upon his mind was of course painful and gloomy. As the sweetest music sounding at the same time with inharmonious notes can but produce harsh dissonance, so the brightest scenes to a mind filled with painful thoughts seems but to deepen their sadness. Still, however, after a time, the objects around him and their bright tranquillity had their effect upon the heart of the count ; his feelings grew calmer, and the magic power of association came to lay out a road whereby fancy might lead his thoughts to gentler themes. The path that he was pursuing led him at length to the spot where the little adventure had occurred which he had related in the course of the morning to his friend. He never passed by that spot without giving a thought to the fair girl he had there met ; but now he dwelt upon the recollection longer than he otherwise might have done, in consequence of having spoken of her and of their meeting that very day. He smiled as he thought of the whole, for there was nothing like pain of any kind mingled with the remembrance. It was merely a fanciful dream he had cherished, half amused at himself for the little romance he had got up in his own mind, half employing the romance

itself as a check upon the very imagination that had framed it.

"She was certainly very lovely," he thought, as he rode on, "and her voice was certainly very sweet; and unless nature, as is but too often the case, had in her instance become accomplice to a falsehood, that form, that face, that voice must have betokened a bright spirit and a noble heart. Alas! why is it," he went on to ask himself, "why is it that the countenance, if we read it aright, should not be the correct interpreter of the heart? Doubtless such was at first God's will, and the serpent taught us, though we could not conceal our hearts from the Almighty, to falsify the stamp he had fixed upon them for our fellow-men. And yet it is strange—however much we may have gained from experience, however painfully we may learn that man's heart is written in his actions, not in his face—it is strange we ever judge more or less by the same deceitful countenance, and guess by its expressions, if not by its features, though we might as well judge of what is at the bottom of a deep stream by the waves that agitate its surface."

In such fanciful dreams he went on, often turning again to the fair vision that he had there seen, sometimes wondering who she could have been, and sometimes deciding, and deciding the question wrongly, in his own mind, but never suffering the wild expectation which he had once nourished of meeting her again to cross his mind; for he had found that to indulge it rendered him uneasy and unfit for more real pursuits.

At length the lane, winding out upon some hills where the short dry turf betokened a rocky soil below, took its way through a country of a less pleasing aspect. Here the Count de Morseiul put his horse into a quicker pace; and, after descending into another low valley full of streams and long luxuriant grass, he climbed slowly a high hill, surmounted by a towering spire. The village to which the spire belonged was very small, and consisted entirely of the low houses of an agricultural population. They were neat, clean, and cheerful, however, in aspect, and there was an attention to niceness of exterior visible everywhere, not very frequently found among the lower classes of any country.

There was scarcely any one in the street as the

count passed, except, indeed, a few children enjoying their evening sport, and taking the day's last hour of happy life before the setting sun brought the temporary extinction of their bright activity. There was also at the end of the town a good old dame sitting at a cottage door and spinning in the tempered sunshine of the evening, while her gray cat rolled happy in the dust beside her; but the whole of the rest of the villagers were still in the fields.

The count rode on, giving the dame "good-even" as he passed; and, leaving what seemed the last house of the village behind him, he took his way along a road shadowed by tall walnut-trees growing upon the edge of a hill, which towered up in high and broken banks on the left, and sloped away upon the right, displaying the whole tract of country through which the young nobleman had just passed, bright in the evening light below, with his own town and castle rising up a fellow hill to that on which he now stood, at the distance of some seven or eight miles.

As he turned one sharp angle of the hill, however, he suddenly drew in his rein on seeing a carriage before him. It was stationary, however, and the two boorish-looking servants, dressed in gray, who accompanied it, were standing at the edge of the hill, gazing over the country as if the scene were new to them; while the horses, which the coachman had left to their own discretion, were stamping in a state of listless dozing, to keep off the flies which the season rendered troublesome.

It was evident that the carriage was held in waiting for some one; and the count, after pausing for a single instant, rode on, looking in as he passed it. There was no one, however, within the wide and clumsy vehicle; and the servants, though they stared at the young stranger, took no notice, and made no sign of reverence as he went by them; with which, indeed, he was well satisfied, not desiring to be recognised by any one who might misjudge his proceedings abroad.

He rode on, then, with somewhat of a quicker pace, to a spot where, at the side of the road, a little wicket gate led into a small grove of old trees, through which a path conducted to a neat stone-built house, of small size, with its garden around it: flowers on the one hand, and potherbs on the other. Nothing could present an

aspect cleaner, neater, more tasteful than the house and the garden. Not a straw was out of its place in the thatch, and every flower-bed of the little parterre was trimmed exactly with the same scrupulous care. The door was of wood, painted gray, with a rope and handle by the side, to which was attached a large bell; but, though at almost all times that door stood open, it was closed on the present occasion. The young count took his way through the grove and the garden straight to the door, as if familiar with the path of old, leaving his horse, however, under the trees, not far from the outer gate. On finding the door closed, he pulled the handle of the bell, though somewhat gently; but, for a moment, no one replied, and he rang again, on which second summons a maidservant of some forty or fifty years appeared, bearing on her head a towering structure of white linen in the shape of a cap, not unlike in shape and snowy whiteness to the uncovered peak of some mountain ridge in the Alps.

On her appearance she uttered an exclamation of pleasure at the sight of the young count, whom she instantly recognised; and, on his asking for her master, she replied that he was busy in conference with two ladies, but that she was sure that the Count de Morseuil might go in at any time. She pointed onward with her hand as she spoke, down the clean, nicely-sanded passage to the door of a small room at the back of the house, looking over the prospect which we have mentioned. It was evidently the good woman's intention that the count should go in and announce himself; but he did not choose to do so, and sent her forward to ask if he might be admitted. A full, clear round voice instantly answered from within on her application, "Certainly, certainly;" and, taking that as his warrant, the count advanced into the room at once. He found it tenanted by three people, on only one of whom, however, we shall pause, as the other two, consisting of a lady dressed in a sort of half mourning, with a thick veil, which she had drawn over her face before the count entered, and another, who was apparently a female servant of a superior class, instantly quitted the room, merely saying to their companion,

"I will not forget."

The third was a man of sixty-two or sixty-three years of age, dressed in black, without sword or any ornament

to his plain, straight-cut clothes. His head was bare, though a small black velvet cap lay on the table beside him, and his white hair, which was suffered to grow very long at the back and on the temples, fell down his neck, and met the plain white collar of his shirt, which was turned back upon his shoulders. The top of his head was bald, rising up from a fine white forehead with all those characteristic marks of expansion and elevation which we are generally inclined to associate in our minds with the idea of powerful intellect and noble feelings. The countenance, too, was fine; the features straight, clear, and well-defined, though the eyes, which had been originally fine and large, were somewhat hollowed by age, and the cheeks, sunken also, left the bones beneath the eyes rather too prominent. The chin was rounded and fine, and the teeth white and undecayed; but, in other respects, the marks of age were very visible. There were lines and furrows about the brow and on the cheeks; and between the eyebrows there was a deep dent, which might give, in some degree, an air of sternness, but seemed still more the effect of intense thought, and, perhaps, of anxious care.

The form of the old man bore evident traces of the powerful and vigorous mould in which it had been originally cast; the shoulders were broad, the chest deep, the arms long and sinewy, the hands large and muscular. The complexion had been originally brown, and perhaps, at one time, florid; but now it was pale, without a trace of colour anywhere but in the lips, which, for a man of that age, were remarkably full and red. The eye, the light of the soul, was still bright and sparkling. It gave no evidence of decay, varying frequently in expression from keen and eager rapidity of thought, and from the rapid changes of feeling in a heart still full of strong emotions.

Such, though the picture is but a faint one, such was the appearance of Claude de l'Estang, Huguenot minister of the small village of Auron, at equal distances from Ruffigny and Morseuil. He had played, in his youth, a conspicuous part in defence of the Huguenot cause; he had been a soldier as well as a preacher, and the sword and musket had been familiar to his hands, so long as the religion of his fathers was assailed by open persecution. No sooner, however, did those times seem to have passed away, than, casting from

him the weapons of carnal warfare, he resumed the exercise of the profession to which he had been originally destined, and became, for the time, one of the most popular preachers in the south of France.

Though his life was irreproachable, his manners pure, and his talents high, Claude de l'Estang had not been without his portion of the faults and failings of humanity. He had been ambitious in his particular manner; he had been vain; he had loved the admiration and applause of the multitude; he had coveted the fame of eloquence, and the reputation of superior sanctity; youth, and youth's eagerness, joined with the energy inseparable from high genius, had carried his natural errors to an extreme: but, long before the period of which we now speak, years, and, still more, sorrows, had worked a great and beneficial, but painful alteration. His first disappointment was the disappointment of the brightest hopes of youth, complicated with all that could aggravate the crossing of early love; for there was joined unto it the blasting of all bright confidence in woman's sincerity, and the destruction of that trust in the eternal happiness of one whom he could never cease to love, which was more painful to the mind of a sincere and enthusiastic follower of his own particular creed than the loss of all his other hopes together. He had loved early, and loved above his station; and encouraged by hope, and by the smiles of one who fancied that she loved in return, his ambition had been stimulated by passion, till all the great energies of his mind were called forth to raise himself to the highest celebrity. When he had attained all, however; when he saw multitudes flock to hear his voice, and thousands hanging upon the words of his lips as upon oracles, even then, at the moment when he thought everything must yield to him, he had seen an unexpected degree of coldness come upon her he loved, and apparent reluctance to fulfil the promises which had been given when his estate was lowlier. Some slight opposition on the part of noble and wealthy parents; opposition that would have yielded to entreaties less than urgent, was assigned as the cause of the hesitation which wrung his heart. The very duties which he himself had inculcated, and which, had there been real love at heart, would have found a very different interpretation, were now urged in opposition to his wishes; and, mortified and pained,

Claude de l'Estang watched anxiously for the ultimate result. We need not pause upon all the steps; the end was, that he saw her, to whom he had devoted every affection of a warm and energetic heart, break her engagements to him, wed an enemy of her father's creed, renounce the religion in which she had been brought up, and, after some years of ephemeral glitter in a corrupt court, become faithless to the husband for whom she had become faithless to her religion, and end her days in bitterness in a convent, where her faith was suspected and her real sins daily reproved.

In the mean while, Claude de l'Estang had wrestled with his own nature. He had refrained from showing mortification, or grief, or despair; he had kept the serpent within his own bosom, and fed him upon his own heart: he had abandoned not his pulpit; he had neglected, in no degree, his flock; he had publicly held up, as a warning to others, the dereliction of her whom he most loved, as one who had gone out from among them because she was not of them; he had become sterner, indeed more severe, in his doctrines as well as in his manners, and this first sorrow had a tendency rather to harden than to soften his heart.

The next thing, however, which he had to undergo, was the punishment of that harshness. A youth of a gentle but eager disposition, who had been his own loved companion and friend, whom he still esteemed highly for a thousand good and engaging qualities, was betrayed into an error, on the circumstances of which we will not pause. Suffice it to say that it proceeded from strong passion and circumstances of temptation, and that for it he was eager and willing to make atonement. He was one of the congregation of Claude de l'Estang, however, and the minister showed himself the more determined, on account of the friendship that existed between them, not to suffer the fault to pass without the humiliation of public penitence; and he exacted all, to the utmost tittle, that a harsh church, in its extremest laws, could demand, ere it received a sinner back into its bosom again. The young man submitted, feeling deep repentance, and believing his own powers of endurance to be greater than they were. But the effect was awful. From the church door, when he had performed the act demanded of him, fancying that the finger of scorn would be pointed at him for ever, he

fled to his own home with reason cast headlong from her throne. Ere two hours were over he had died by his own hand; scrawling with his blood, as it flowed from him, a brief epistle to his former friend to tell him that the act was his.

That awful day and those few lines not only filled the bosom of the minister with remorse and grief, but it opened his eyes to everything that had been dark in his own bosom. It showed him that he had made a vanity of dealing with his friend more severely than he would have done with others; that it was for his own reputation's sake that he had thus acted; that there was pride in the severe austerity of his life; that there was something like hypocrisy in the calm exterior with which he had covered over a broken heart. He felt that he had mighty enemies to combat in himself; and, as his heart was originally pure and upright, his energies great, and his power over himself immense, he determined that he would at once commence the war, and never end it till, to use his own words, "he had subdued every stronghold of the evil spirit in his breast, and expelled the enemy of his eternal Master for ever."

He succeeded in his undertaking: his very first act was to resign to others the cure of his congregation in Rochelle; the next to apply for and obtain the cure of the little Protestant congregation in the remote village of Auron. Every argument was brought forward to induce him to stay in La Rochelle, but every argument proved inefficacious. The vanity of popularity he fancied might be a snare to him, and he refused all entreaties. When he came among the good villagers, he altered the whole tone and character of his preaching. It became simple, calm, unadorned, suited in every respect to the capacity of the lowest person that heard him. All the fire of his eloquence was confined to urging upon his hearers their duties, in the tone of one whose whole soul and expectations were staked upon their salvation. He became mild and gentle, too, though firm when it was needful; and the reputation which he had formerly coveted still followed him when he sought to cast it off. No synod of the Protestant clergy took place without the opinion of Claude de l'Estang being cited almost without appeal; and whenever advice, or consolation, or support was wanting, men would travel

for miles to seek it at the humble dwelling of the village pastor.

His celebrity, joined with his mildness, gained great immunities for himself and his flock during the early part of the reign of Louis XIV. At first, indeed, when he took upon himself the charge of Auron, the Catholic authorities of the neighbouring towns, holding in remembrance his former character, imagined that he had come there to make proselytes, and prepared to wage the strife with vehemence against him. The intendant of the province was urged to visit the little village of Auron, to cause the spire of the church—which had been suffered to remain, as all the inhabitants of the neighbouring district were Protestants—to be pulled down, and the building reduced to the shape and dimensions to which the temples of the Protestants were generally restricted: but, ere the pastor had been many months there, his conduct was so different from what had been expected; he kept himself so completely aloof from everything like cabal or intrigue; he showed so little disposition to encroach upon the rights, or to assail the religion of others; that, knowing his talents and his energies when roused into action, the neighbouring Catholics embraced the opinion that it would be better to leave him undisturbed.

The intendant of the province was a wise and moderate man; and although, when urged, he could not neglect to visit the little town of Auron, yet he did so after as much delay as possible, and with the determination of dealing as mildly with its pastor and its population as possible. When he came, he found the minister so mild, so humble, so unlike what he had been represented, that his good intentions were strengthened. He was obliged to say that he must have the spire of the church taken down, although it was shown that there was not one Catholic family to be offended at the sight within seven or eight miles around. But Claude de l'Estang only smiled at the proposal, saying that he could preach quite as well if it were away; and the intendant, though he declared that it was absolutely necessary to be done, by some accident always forgot to give orders to that effect; and even at a later period discovered that the spire, both from its own height and from the height of the hill on which it stood, sometimes acted as a landmark to ships at sea.

Thus the spire remained ; and here, in calm tranquillity, Claude de l'Estang had, at the time we speak of, passed more than thirty years of his life. A small private fortune of his own enabled him to exercise any benevolent feelings to which his situation might give rise : simple in habits, he required little for himself ; active and energetic in mind, he never wanted time to attend to the spiritual and temporal wants of his flock with the most minute attention. Though ever grave and sad himself, he was ever pleased to see the peasantry happy and amused ; and he felt practically every day, in comparing Auron with Rochelle, how much better is love than popularity. No magistrate, no judge, had any occupation in the town of Auron, for the veneration in which he was held was a law to the place. Any disputes that occurred among the inhabitants in consequence of the inseparable selfishness of our nature, were instantly referred to him : and he was sure to decide in such a way as instantly to satisfy the great bulk of the villagers that he was right. There were no recusants ; for though there might be individuals who, from folly or obstinacy, or the blindness of selfishness, would have opposed his decision if it had stood unsupported, yet, when the great mass of their fellow-villagers were against them also, they dared not utter a word. If there was any evil committed ; if youth, and either youth's passions or its follies produced wrong, the pastor had learned ever to censure mildly, to endeavour to amend rather than to punish, and to repair the evil that had been done rather than to castigate him to whom it was attributable.

In such occupations passed the greater part of his time ; and he felt to the very heart the truth of the words, even in this world, that "blessed are the peacemakers." The rest of his time he devoted either to study or to relaxation. What he called study was the deep, intense application of his mind to the knowledge and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, whether in translation or in the original languages. What he called relaxation divided itself into two parts ; the reading of that high classical literature which had formed the great enjoyment of his youth, and by attention to which his eloquence had been chiefly formed ; and the cultivation of his flower-garden, of which he was extremely fond, together with the superintendence of the little farm

which surrounded his mansion. His life, in short, was a life of primeval simplicity; his pleasures few, but sweet and innocent; his course of existence, for many years at least, smooth and unvaried, remote from strife, and dedicated to do good.

From time to time, indeed, persons of a higher rank, and of thoughts and manners much more refined than those of the villagers by whom he was surrounded, would visit his retirement, to seek his advice or enjoy his conversation; and on these occasions he certainly did feel a refreshment of mind from the living communion with persons of equal intellect, which could not be gained even from his converse with the mighty dead. Still it never made him wish to return to situations in which such opportunities were more frequent, if not constant. "It is enough as it is," he said; "it now comes like a refreshing shower upon the soil of the heart, teaching it to bring forth flowers; but, perhaps, if that rain were more plentiful and continued always, there would be nothing but flowers, and no fruit. I love my solitude, though perhaps I love it not unbroken."

It rarely happened that these visits had anything that was at all painful or annoying in them, for the means of communication between one part of the country and another were in that day scanty; and those who came to see him could in no degree be moved by curiosity, but must either be instigated by some motive of much importance, or brought thither by the desire of a mind capable of comprehending and appreciating his. He seldom, we may almost say he never, went out to visit any one but the members of his own flock in his spiritual capacity. He had twice, indeed, in thirty years, been at the chateau of Morseiul, but that was first on the occasion of a dangerous illness of the countess, the mother of Count Albert, and then on the commencement of those encroachments upon the rights of the Huguenots which had now been some time in progress.

The Counts of Morseiul, however, both father and son, visited him often. The first he had regarded well-nigh as a brother; the latter he looked upon almost in the light of a son. He loved their conversation from its sincerity, its candour, and its vigour. The experience of the old count, which came united with none of the hardness of heart and feeling which experience too often brings; the freshness of mind, the fanciful en-

thusiasms of the younger nobleman, alike interested, pleased, and attached him. With both there were points of immediate communication, by which his mind entered instantly into the thoughts and feelings of theirs; and he felt throughout every fresh conversation with them that he was dealing with persons worthy of communication with him, both by brightness and elevation of intellect, by earnest energy of character, by virtue, honour, and uprightness, and by the rare gem of unchangeable truth.

It may well be supposed, then, that he rose to meet the young Count de Morseiul, of whose return to his own domains he had not been made aware, with a smile of unmixed satisfaction.

"Welcome, my dear Albert," he said, addressing him by the name which he had used towards him from childhood; "welcome back to your own dwelling and your own people. How have you fared in the wars? How have you fared in perilous camps, and in the field, and in the still more perilous court? And how long is it since you returned to Morseiul?"

"I have fared well, dear friend," replied the count, "in all; have had some opportunity of serving the king, and have received more thanks than those services deserved. In regard to the court, where I could neither serve him, nor myself, nor any one else, I have escaped its perils this year, by obtaining permission to come straight from the army to Morseiul, without visiting either Paris or Versailles; and now, as to your last question, when I arrived, I would say but yesterday afternoon, were it not that you would, I know, thank me for coming to see you so speedily, when, in truth, I only intended to come to-morrow, had not some circumstances, not so pleasant as I could wish, though not so bad as I fear may follow, brought me hither to consult with you to-day."

A slight cloud came over the old man's countenance as his younger companion spoke.

"Is the difficulty in which you seek counsel, Albert," he demanded, "in your own household, or in the household of our suffering church?"

"Alas," replied the count, "it is in the latter, my excellent friend; had it been in my own household, unless some urgent cause impelled me, I should not have thus troubled you."

"I feared so, I feared so," replied the old man; "I have heard something of these matters of late: so they will not leave us in repose!" And, as he spoke, he rose from the chair he had resumed after welcoming the count, and paced the room backward and forward more than once.

"It is in vain," he said, at length, casting himself back into his seat, "to let such things agitate me. The disposal of all is in a better and a firmer hand than mine. 'On this rock will I found my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!' So said our divine Master; and I need not tell you, Albert of Morseiul, that when he said 'on this rock,' he meant on the rock of faith, and did not mean the trumpery juggle, the buffoon-like playing on the name of Peter, which the disciples of a corrupt sect would attribute to him. He has founded his church upon the rock of faith, and thereon do I build my hope; for I cannot but see that the enemy are preparing the spear and making ready the bow against us. Whether it be God's will that we shall resist, as we have done in former times, and be enabled, though but a handful among a multitude, to smite the enemies and the perverters of our pure religion, or whether we shall be called upon to die as martyrs, and seal our faith by the pouring out of our blood, leaving another example to the elect that come after us, will be pointed out by the circumstances in which we are placed. But I see clearly that the sword is out to smite us, and we must either resist or endure."

"It is precisely on that point," replied the count, "that I came to consult with you. Measures of a strong, a harassing, and of an unjust nature, are taking place against us, because we will not say we believe that which we are sure is false, and follow doctrines which our soul repudiates. Did I hope, my excellent friend, that the matter would stop here; did I expect that such measures of petty annoyance as I have heard proclaimed in the town of Morseiul to-day, or anything, indeed, similar to those measures, would be the final end and limit of the attack upon our liberties and our faith, I should be most anxious to calm the minds of the people, to persuade them to endure than to resist, and to remember that patience will cure many things: I should ask you, I should beseech even you, plighted as you are to support the cause of truth and righteousness, to aid

me in my efforts, and to remember at what an awful price indemnity must be bought ; to remember how fearful, how terrible must be the scenes through which we wade to the attainment of those equal rights which should be granted even without our seeking them."

"And I would aid you ! and I would remember !" exclaimed the pastor, grasping his hand, "so help me the God of my trust, Albert of Morseiul," he continued, more vehemently, "as I have ever avoided for long years every cause of strife and dissension, every matter of offence thrown in my way by those who would persecute us. Nay, more, far more ; when my counsels have been sought, when my advice has been required, the words that I have spoken have always been pacific ; not alone peaceful in sound, but peaceful in spirit and in intent, and peaceful in every tendency ; I have counselled submission where I might have stirred up war ; I have advised mild means and supplications when the time for successful resistance was pointed out both by just cause for bitter indignation, and by the embarrassment of our enemies in consequence of their over ambition : and now I tell thee, Albert, I tell thee with pain and apprehension, that I doubt, that I much doubt whether, in so doing, I have acted right or wrong ; whether, by such timid counsels, the happy moment has not been suffered to slip ; whether our enemies, more wise in their generation than we are, have not taken advantage of our forbearance, have not waited till they themselves were in every way prepared, and are now ready to execute the iniquitous designs which have only been suspended in consequence of ambitious efforts in other quarters."

"I fear, indeed, that it is so," replied the young count ; "but, nevertheless, neither you nor any other person has cause to reproach himself for such conduct. Forbearance, even if taken advantage of by insidious enemies, must always be satisfactory to one's own heart."

"I know not, I know not," replied the old man. "In my early days, Albert, these hands have grasped the sword in defence of my religion ; and we were then taught that resistance to the will of those bigots and tyrants who would crush out the last spark of the pure worship of God, and substitute in its place the gross idolatry which disfigures this land, was a duty to the Author of our faith. We were then taught that resistance

was not optional, but compulsory ; and that to our children, and to our brethren, and to our ancestors, we owed the same determined, persevering, uncompromising efforts that were required from us by the service of the Lord likewise. We were taught that we should never surrender, that we should never hesitate, that we should never compromise, till the liberty of the true reformed church of France was established upon a sure and permanent basis, or the last drop of blood in the veins of her saints was poured out into the cup of martyrdom. Such were the doctrines, Albert, that were taught in my youth, such were the doctrines under which I myself became a humble soldier of the cross. But, alas ! lulled with the rest of my brethren into a fatal security, thinking that no further infraction of our liberties would take place ; believing that we should always be permitted to worship the God of our salvation according to the dictates of our own conscience ; perhaps even believing, Albert, that some degree of contumely and persecution, some stigma attached to the poor name of Huguenot, might be beneficial, if not necessary, in our frail condition as mortal men, to be a bond of union among us to maintain our religion in its purity, and to keep alive the flame of zeal ; believing all this, I have not bestirred myself to resist small encroachments ; I have even counselled others to pass them over without notice. Now, however, I am convinced that it is the intention, perhaps not of the king, for men say that he is kind and clement, but of the base men that surround him, gradually to sap the foundations of our church, and cast it down altogether. I have seen it in every act that has been taking place of late, have marked it in every proceeding of the court ; and, though slow and insidious, covered with base pretexts and pitiful quibbles, the progress of our enemies has been sure, and I fear that it may be too late to close the door against them ; I could recall all their acts one by one, and the summing up would clearly show that the idolatrous priesthood of this popish land are determined not to suffer a purer faith to remain any longer as an offence and reproach unto them."

"I much wish," replied the count, earnestly, "that you would put down, in order, these encroachments. I have been long absent, serving in the field, where my faith has, of course, been no obstacle, and where we have little discussion of such matters : but if I had them

clearly stated before me, I and the other Protestant noblemen of France might draw up a petition to the king, whose natural sense of right is very strong, which would induce him to do us justice—”

The old man shook his head with a look of melancholy doubt, but the count immediately added, repeating the words he had just used, “to do us justice, or to make such a declaration of his intentions as to enable us to take measures to meet the exigency of the moment.”

“Willingly, most willingly,” said Claude de l’Estang, “will I tell you all that is done and has been doing by our enemies. I will tell you also, Albert, all the false and absurd charges that they urge against us to justify their own iniquitous dealings towards us. We will consider the whole together calmly and dispassionately, and take counsel as to what may best be done. God forbid that I should see the blood of my fellow Christians shed; but God forbid, also, that I should see his holy church overthrown.”

“You speak of charges against us, sir,” said the count, with some surprise in his countenance; “I knew not that even malice itself could find or forge a charge against the Huguenots of France. At the court and in the camp there is no charge; tell me what we have done in the provinces to give even a foundation for a charge.”

“Nothing, my young friend,” replied the clergyman; “we have done nothing but defend the immunities secured unto us by the hand of the very king who now seeks to snatch them from us. We have not even defended, as perhaps we should, the unalienable privileges given us by a greater king. No; the insidious plan of our deceitful enemies has been to attack us first, and then to lay resistance to our charge as a crime. Take but a few instances. In the towns of Tonnay and of Privas, the reformed religion was not only the dominant religion, but the sole religion, and had been so for near a century; the inhabitants were all Protestants, tranquil, quiet, industrious. There were no religious contentions, there were no jealous feuds, when some one, prompted by the fiend, whispered to the crown that means should be taken to establish in those places the authority of the idolatrous church; that opportunity should be given for making converts from the pure to

the corrupted faith; that, in the end, the pillage of the Protestant congregations should be permitted to the Romish priesthood. An order was instantly given for opening a Romish church in a place where there were no papists, and for preaching against our creed in the midst of its sincere followers. The church was accordingly opened; the singing of Latin masses and the exhibition of idolatrous processions commenced where such things had not been known in the memory of man; a few boys hooted, and instantly there was raised a cry that the Romish priests were interrupted in their functions; that the ceremonies of the church were opposed by the whole mass of Huguenots. What was the result? The parliament of Paris gave authenticity to the calumny by granting letters of protection to the intruding clergy; and then, taking its own act as proof of the guilt of the Huguenots, commanded our temples to be pulled down, and the free exercise of our religion in that place to be abolished. This was the case at Tonnay; and if, at the same time, the decree which announced its fate to that city had boldly forbidden our worship throughout the land, we might have displayed some union and made some successful resistance. But our enemies were too wise to give us such a general motive; they struck an isolated blow here and an isolated blow there; they knew man's selfishness; they foresaw how apathetic we should be to the injuries of our fellows; and they were right. The Huguenots of France made no effort in favour of those who suffered; some never inquired into the question at all, and believed that the people of Tonnay had brought the evil on their own heads; some shrugged the indifferent shoulder, and thought it not worth while to trouble the peace of the whole community for the sake of a single small town. Had it been your town of Morseiul, it would have been the same, for such has been the case with Privas, with Dexodun, with Melle, with Chevreux, with Vitré, and full fifty more; and not one Protestant has moved to support the rights of his brother. Whenever, indeed, anything has occurred affecting the whole body, then men have flocked to us, demanding advice and assistance; they have talked of open resistance, of immediate war, of defending their rights, of opposing further aggressions; but I have never seen, Albert, that, mingled with a few determined and noble spirits, there have

been many selfish, many indifferent; and I know that, unless some strong and universal bond of union be given them, some great common motive be afforded, thousands will fall off in the hour of need, and leave their defenders in the hands of the enemy. For this reason, as well as for many others, I have always urged peace where peace can be obtained; but I see now such rapid progress made against us, that I tremble between two terrible results."

The young count gazed thoughtfully in the pastor's face for a few moments ere he replied. "I fear," he said at length, "that we have not yet a sufficient motive to bind all men, as is most needful, in the strong assertion of a common cause. Heaven forbid that we should do or even think of aught disloyal or rebellious; but I doubt much, though the new injury we have received is gross, that it will furnish a sufficient motive to unite all our brethren in one general representation to the king of our general grievances. Yet there are many points in the edict I heard read to-day wounding to the vanity of influential men among us, and that motive will often move them when others fail. But listen, and tell me what you think. These were the chief heads of the proclamation:" and he went on to recapitulate all that he had heard, the old man listening with attention while he spoke.

"I fear there is no bond of union here," replied the pastor, commenting upon some of the heads which the young count had given him; "rather, my good young friend, matter for dissension. They have cunningly thrown in more than one apple of discord to divide the mayors of the Protestant towns from their people, ay, and even to make the pastors odious to the flock."

"Let us, however," said the count, "endeavour to act as unitedly as possible; let us keep a wary eye upon the proceedings of our enemies; let us be prepared to seize the fit moment for opposition, that we may seize it before it be necessary to resist in a manner that may be imputed to us as disloyal. Doubtless, at the assembling of the states of the province, which will take place shortly, there will be a great number of the Protestant nobles present, and I will endeavour to bring them to a general conference, in the course of which we may, perhaps—"

"Hark!" said the old man, "there is the noise of a

horse's feet;" and the next instant a loud ringing of the bell was heard, followed by the sound of a voice in the passage, speaking to the maidservant in jocular and facetious tones, with which the young count was well acquainted.

"It is my rascally valet, Riquet," he said. "He's always thrusting himself where he has no business."

"I wonder you retain him in your service," said the pastor; "I have marked him in your father's time, and have heard you both say that he is a knave."

"And yet he loves me," said the young count; "and I do in truth believe would sooner injure himself than me."

The old man shook his head with an expression of doubt; but the count went on: "However, I did not wish him to know that I came here to-night, and still less should wish him to be acquainted with the nature of my errand. He is a papist, you know, and may suspect, perhaps, that we are holding a secret council with others. We had better, therefore, give him admittance at once."

There was a small silver bell stood on the table beside the pastor; and, as the maid did not come in, he rang it, inquired who it was that had arrived when she did make her appearance, and then ordered the valet to be admitted.

"What brought you here, Maître Jerome?" demanded the young count, somewhat sternly, as the valet entered on his tiptoes, with a look of supreme self-satisfaction.

"Why, my lord," replied the man, "scarcely had you set out when there arrived a courier from the Duc de Rouvré, bringing you a packet. He was asked to leave it, as you were absent; but he said it was of vast importance, and that he was to get your answer from your own mouth: so he would give it to nobody. I took him into what used to be called the page's room, and made him drink deep of chateau Thierry, picked his pocket of the packet while he was looking out of the window, and, seeing that he was tired to death, commended him to his bed, with a nightcap of good liquor, promising to wake him as soon as you returned, and then set off with the packet to seek you, Monsieur le Comte."

"And, pray, what was the object of all this trickery?"

demanded the count. "If you be not careful, Maitre Jerome, you will place your neck in a cord some day."

"So my mother used to say," replied the man, with cool effrontery; "but I only wished to serve your lordship; and, knowing that there were difficult matters in hand, thought you might like to read the packet first, in order to be prepared to give a ready answer. We could easily seal up the letter again, and slip it into the courier's jerkin, which the poor fool put under his head when he went to sleep, thinking to secure the packet that was already gone. He would then present it to you in due form, and you give your answer without any apparent forethought."

The count could not refrain from turning a smiling look upon the pastor, who, however, bent down his eyes and shook his head with a disapproving sigh.

The count, at the same time, tore open the packet which the servant had handed to him with a ruthless roughness, that made good Jerome Riquet start and cry "Oh!" with an expression of pain upon his countenance, to see not the slightest possibility left of ever patching up the letter again, so as to make it appear as if it had never been opened.

"And I suppose, Master Jerome," continued the count, while making his way into the packet, "that you took the trouble of watching me when I set out this afternoon."

"Heaven forbid, sir," replied the man; "that would have been both very impertinent, and an unnecessary waste of time and attention, as I knew quite well where you were going. As soon as you had been out to hear the proclamation and keep the people quiet, and came home and sat with the shuttlecock Marquis de Hericourt, and then ordered your horse, I said to myself, and I told Henriot, 'his lordship is gone to consult with Monsieur Claude de l'Estang; and where, indeed, could he go so well as to one who is respected by the Catholics almost as much as by the Huguenots? Whom could he apply to so wisely as to one whose counsels are always judicious, always peaceful, and always benevolent?'" and, having finished this piece of oratory, Riquet—perceiving that his master, busy in the letter, gave him no attention—made a low but somewhat grotesque reverence to the good pastor, bending his head, rounding his back, and elevating his shoulders, while

his long thin legs stuck out below, so that he assumed very much the appearance of a sleeping crane.

The pastor, however, shook his head, replying gravely, "My good friend, I have lived more than sixty-five years in the world, and yet, I trust, age has not diminished the intellect which experience may have tended to improve."

By the time he had said this the young count had read to the end of the short letter which he had received, and put it before the pastor.

"This is kind," he said, "and courteous of my good friend the duke, who, though I have not seen him for many years, still retains his regard for our family. Jerome, you may retire," he added, "and wait for me without. This letter which you have brought is of no importance whatever; a mere letter of civility; so that either you or the duke's courier has lied."

"Oh, it was the courier, sir," replied the valet, with his usual quiet impudence; "it was the courier, of course; otherwise there is no truth in the old proverb, *Cheat like a valet, lie like a courier*. I always keep to my own department, sir;" and, so saying, marched out of the room.

In the mean time Claude de l'Estang had read the letter, which invited the young count to visit the Duc de Rouvré at Poitiers, and take up his abode in the governor's house some days before the meeting of the states. It went on to express great regard for the young nobleman himself, and high veneration for his father's memory; and then, glancing at the religious differences existing in the province, and the measures which had been lately taken against the Huguenots, it went on to state that the writer was anxious to receive the private advice and opinion of the young count as to the best means of extinguishing all irritation on such subjects.

"Were this from any other man than the Duc de Rouvré," said the pastor, "I should say that it was specious and intended to mislead; but the duc has always shown himself favourable to the Protestants as a politician, and, I have some reason to believe, is not unfavourable to their doctrines in his heart: but go, my son, go as speedily as possible, and God grant that your efforts may conclude with peace."

After a few more words of the same tenour, the pas-
VOL. I.—G

tor and his young friend separated, and the count and his valet, mounting their horses, took their way back towards the chateau with the shades of night beginning to gather quickly about them.

CHAPTER IV.

UNEXPECTED COMPANIONS.

THE two horsemen rode to the village at a quick rate, but then slackened their pace, and passed through the single little street at a walk. The scene, however, was now changed; the children were no longer playing before the doors; from out of the windows of some of the cottages streamed forth the reddish light of a resin candle; from others was heard issuing the sound of a psalm, sung before the inhabitants retired to rest; and at the doors of others again appeared a peasant, returned late from the toil of the day, and—as is so natural to the heart of man—pausing in the thickening twilight to take one more look of the world before the darkness of night shut it out altogether. A star or two was beginning to appear in the sky; the bats were flitting hither and thither through the dusk; and, though it was still warm and mild, everything betokened the rapid approach of night.

From the village the count rode on, relapsing, after having spoken a few words to his servant, into the same meditative mood which had possessed him on his way to Auron. He hastened not his pace, and, after he had gone about three miles, complete darkness surrounded him. There was no moon in the sky; the road by which he had come, steep, stony, and irregular, required full light to render it safe for his horse's knees; and, after the animal had tripped more than once, the count struck into a path to the right, which led by a little *détour* into the high road from Paris to Poitiers.

High roads, however, in those days were very different things from those which they have now become; and there is scarcely a parish road in England, or a commercial road in France, which is not wider, more

open, and better in every respect than the high road we speak of was at that time. When he had gained it, however, the count went on more easily till he arrived at the spot where it entered one of the large woods which supplied the inhabitants with fuel in a country unproductive of coal. There, however, he met with an obstruction which he had not at all anticipated. As he approached the outskirts of the wood, there was a sudden flash to the right, and a ball whistled across the count's path, but without hitting either himself or his servant.

He was too much accustomed to scenes in which such winged messengers of death were common to be startled by the shot, but, merely muttering to himself, "This is unpleasant; we must put a stop to this so near Morseiul," he considered whether it would be better for him to push his horse forward or to go back upon the open road. But the matter was settled for him by others: for he was surrounded in a moment by five or six men, who speedily pulled him off his horse, though he made no effort to resist where resistance, he saw, would be vain, and then demanded his name in an imperative and threatening manner. He heard, however, at the same time, the galloping of the horse of Jerome Riquet, who had remained some twenty or thirty yards behind him; and perfectly certain, therefore, that very efficient aid would soon be brought to deliver him, he determined to procrastinate as far as possible, in the hopes of taking some of the plunderers who had established themselves so near his dwelling.

"I cannot see," he said, "what your business can be with my name; if it is my money that you want, any that I have upon my person you can take. My good friend, you will oblige me by not holding my collar so tight; it gives me a feeling of strangulation, which, as you may perhaps some day know, is not very pleasant."

The man who held him, and who seemed the principal of the group, did not appear to be at all offended at being reminded of what might be the end of his exploits, but let go his collar, laughing and saying, "You are merry! however, your money we shall take as our own right. It is fair toll, you know; and your name we must have too; as, being officers of the king's high-

way, if not of the king, we have certainly a right to ask for passports."

"Heaven forbid that I should deny any of your rights," replied the count; "my money I will give you with all my heart; but my name is my own, and I do not choose to give that to any one."

"Well, then, we must take you where we can see your face," replied the other. "Then, if we know you, well and good, you shall go on; if we do not know you, we shall find means to make you speak more clearly, I will warrant."

"He is one of them! he is one of them, be you sure," replied a second voice. "I would tie him to a tree, and shoot him at once out of the way."

"No, no," rejoined the first; "I think I know his tongue. It is Maître Nicolas, the notary; not a bad man in his way. Bring him along, and his horse too; we shall soon see."

Though the count, perhaps, might not consider himself flattered by being taken for Maître Nicolas the notary, he began to perceive that there was something more in the conduct of these men than the common desire of plunder, some personal motive either of revenge or enmity; and, as he well knew that he was generally loved throughout the neighbourhood, he had no apprehensions as to the result regarding himself. He was anxious, however, to see more of his captors' proceedings, and therefore accompanied them without any effort to undeceive them as to who he was. They led him along for about a quarter of a mile down the high road through the wood, then struck into a narrower path to the right, only in use for woodcarts, and then again took a footpath, which brought them to a spot where a bright light was seen glimmering through the trees before them. It was evident that some wider road than that which they were following at the moment led also to the point to which it tended, for the sound of horses' feet was heard in that direction, and a creaking, as if of some heavy carriage-wheels.

"There is brown Keroual," said one of the men, "come back from the other end of the wood, and I'll bet you two louis to two deniers that he's got hold of them. Don't you hear the wheels? I think we might let you go," he added, turning towards the count, and

trying to get a full glance of his face by the light that flashed through the leaves.

At that moment, however, one of his companions replied, "Take him on, take him on! You can't tell what wheels they are. They may be sending away those women."

This seemed to decide the matter somewhat to the satisfaction of Albert de Morseiul, who was not a little anxious to witness what was going on; and the men accordingly led him forward through the bushes, which partially obstructed the path, till, coming suddenly to an open space under a high sandy bank, he found himself in the midst of a scene upon which we must pause for a moment.

There was a large wood fire in the midst of the open space; and both to the right and left led away a small road, deeply channelled by the wheels of sandcarts. The high bank above was crowned with the fine trees of the wood, among the branches and stems of which the light of the fire and one or two torches lost itself, while the fuller light below shone upon three or four curious groups of human beings. One of these groups was gathered together near the fire, and consisted of seven men, some lying down, some standing, all of them well armed, and some of them with carbines in their hands; their dress in a great degree resembled that of the English soldiery at the time of Cromwell, though the usurper had been dead, and the fashion of such clothing gone out, about twenty years. A few of them had their faces bare, but the greater part had something drawn over their countenance so as completely to disguise it. In general, this covering was a mere piece of silk or cloth, with slits made for the eyes, but in two instances a regular mask appeared.

At a little distance from the fire, farther under the bank, sat two ladies, one richly habited in the taste of that day, and with the upper part of the face covered by the common black velvet riding-mask, the other dressed more simply, but still handsomely, with a large watch hanging by her side, and two or three rings still upon her hands, notwithstanding the company in which she was found. There were some large gray cloaks spread upon the ground beneath them, to protect them apparently from the damp of the ground; and standing near, leaning on a musket, apparently as a guard over

them, was one of the same fraternity that appeared by the side of the fire.

At some distance up the road to the right, a carriage was seen stationary, with the horses taken out and cropping the grass by the side; but the eyes of the whole party under the bank were turned to the other side, where, at the entrance of the road into the open space, appeared a second carriage, drawn by four mules, which had just been led up by a party of the banditti, who were the first that had appeared mounted.

From the door of the vehicle, which was now brought to a halt, its tenants were in the very act of descending, with fear and unwillingness written upon their countenances. The first two that came forth were ecclesiastics of the Catholic church; the first a man who might well be considered as remarkably ugly, had his countenance not been expressive, and its expression indicative of considerable talent. The second was a much handsomer man in every respect, but with a keen, sly, foxlike aspect, and a constant habit of biting his nether lip, of which he could not divest himself, even at a moment when, to judge by his countenance, he was possessed by extraordinary fear. After them came another man, dressed as a layman, one or two domestics, and a fat inferior priest, with a dirty and greasy countenance, full of nothing but large black eyes and dull stupidity.

While they were thus making their unwilling exit from the carriage, several of those who had brought them thither were mounted upon different parts of the vehicle, busily cutting off, opening, and emptying various valises, trunk-mails, and other contrivances for conveying luggage.

The attention of the other actors in the scene was so much taken up by this group, that no one seemed to notice the arrival of the party which brought the count thither; and though the man who had led it had resumed a grasp of his collar, as if to demonstrate that the count was the captive of his bow and spear, he was himself so intensely occupied in looking at the proceedings round the carriage, that he paused close to the wood for several minutes. At length, however, he recollected himself, and, by advancing two or three steps with those that followed, called the attention of the rest from the carriage and its ejected tenants to the

new captive that had been brought in. The light flashed full upon the count as the man held him; but the moment the eyes of the group around the fire were turned upon him, several voices exclaimed in a tone of surprise and consternation, "The Count! The Count! The Count de Morseiul!"

No sooner did the first of the ecclesiastics, who had descended from the carriage, hear the exclamation, than he turned his eyes in that way also, ran forward, and, catching the count by the hand, exclaimed, "Monsieur de Morseiul, my dear friend, I claim your protection. These men threaten to murder me!"

"Monsieur Pelisson," replied the count, "I greatly grieve that I can give you no protection. I am a prisoner to these men, as you see, myself; and, were I not of another creed, might, for aught I know, have to apply to you to shrive me! for they have threatened to tie me to a tree, and shoot me likewise."

"Good God! this is very horrible," cried Pelisson, in utter terror and consternation. "Pray, Monsieur de St. Helie," he exclaimed, turning to the other ecclesiastic who followed, "pray exhort these men—you are so eloquent!"

"I—I—I—I can exhort nobody," stammered forth the other, trembling in every limb.

A change, however, was working itself in their favour; for the moment that the count's name had been publicly announced, a great degree of agitation and movement had taken place among the robbers. Those who had been lying down started up, those who had been plundering the carriage abandoned their pillage, and joined their companions by the fire; the man who had grasped the count let go his hold as if he had burned his hand, and a rapid consultation evidently took place among the rest, which the count himself was not a little surprised to see, as, among those whose faces were uncovered, there was not a single individual whom he could recognise as having ever beheld before.

The movement of Pelisson, however, and the words which passed between him and the count, again called their attention in that direction from the consultation which was going on. Two men, both masked, separated themselves from the rest, one a very tall and powerful man, somewhat richly though not tastefully dressed; the other a short, broad-made, sturdy-looking per-

son, who only wanted the accompaniment of a bandoleer over his buff coat to be a perfect representation of the parliamentary soldier of Great Britain. The lesser man took upon himself to be spokesman, though they both advanced direct towards the count.

"We are sorry for what has happened, Monsieur de Morseiul," he said; "we had not the slightest intention of disturbing you upon your road, and it was this fellow's stupidity and the darkness of the night that has caused the mistake. I have only to say, as I said before, that we are sorry for it, and that you are quite at liberty to go when you like."

The count's determination was taken in a moment. "I am happy to hear," he said, "that you are sorry for one offence at least against the laws of the country; but, in regard to my going, if I go, I have not the slightest intention of going alone. I am not a person to abandon my companions in distress, and I must insist upon some of the parties here present being liberated as well as myself."

Pelisson looked at him with an imploring glance; the Abbé de St. Helie clasped his hands together, and gazed anxiously in his face; while the man to whom he had spoken replied in a surly tone,

"We would fain treat you well, Sir Count, and do you no harm; so go your way, in God's name, and do not meddle with what does not concern you, for fear worse come of it. You are not leading the forlorn hope at Maestricht now, remember."

"Oh!" said the count, with a meaning nod of the head, as if the man's allusion had led him into some secret; but, ere he could reply further, the taller and more athletic of the two whispered a few words to his companion in a low voice, and the other, after a moment's pause of hesitation, turned once more to the count and said, "Well, sir, what is it you would have? We respect and love you, and would do much to please you. What do you demand?"

"In the first place," replied the Count de Morseiul, speaking very slowly and distinctly, and using as many words as he possibly could, knowing that every moment was something gained by bringing succour nearer; "in the first place, as I am sure that you are too much men of honour, and too courteous in your nature a great deal—"

"Come, come, Sir Count," replied the man, interrupting him, "cut your story short. We have honour of our own particular kind; but as to our nature being courteous, it is not. We are neither fools, babies, nor frequenters of the painted chambers of Paris, but free-men of the forest. What I ask is, what do you demand?"

"In the first place," replied the count, taking a step forward towards the spot where the two ladies were sitting, and pointing in that direction with his hand, "in the first place, I demand that you set those two ladies at liberty!"

"They might have been at liberty long ago," replied the man, "if they had chosen to say whence they came and whither they were going. However, go they shall, as you ask it; but I should like to have those rings and that watch first."

"Fy," said the count, "you surely would not touch the trinkets. Their purses, I dare say, have been taken already."

"Those were given up at first," replied the man, "and we should have had the watch and rings too if we had not been interrupted by this other affair. Come, pretty one," he added, turning to the younger of the two ladies, who had both risen when they heard the intercession that was made for them, and were gazing on the young count with eager anxiety, "come, let us see if there be any diamonds among those rings, for we must not let diamonds get out of the forest. They are better than gold, a great deal."

Thus saying, he advanced towards her, and took the small, delicate, beautiful fingers on which the rings appeared in his rough grasp.

"I fear, lady," said the count, who had followed him, "that I cannot protect you farther. We must feel grateful for your being permitted to go at all."

"We owe you a deep debt of gratitude as it is, sir," replied the elder lady; and the younger added immediately, "indeed we do: but let them take the rings," she continued, drawing them from her fingers. "All but one," she added, suddenly, "all but one."

"What, a wedding-ring," cried the man, with a loud laugh, "or a lover's token, I suppose, for I see no wedding-ring here."

"No, sir," she said, drawing up her head somewhat proudly, "but the gift of a mother that loved me, and

who is most dear to me still in memory. Pray let me keep it. This is the ring."

"Why, that is worth all the rest," said the man, looking at it. "No, no, my pretty mistress, we must have this."

The Count de Morseiul had stood by, somewhat pale, and with a manner which, for the first time, betrayed some degree of agitation. But he now interposed, seeing, by the trembling of her hand, how much emotion the man's words produced upon the young lady, though he could not behold her countenance.

"What is the value of the ring?" he demanded of the man.

"Why, some twenty louis, I dare say," he replied.

"Well, I will give you double the amount for it," said the count. "I have not the money upon me, for your men have taken all I had; but you can trust me, and I will pay it to any one whom you will send to the chateau of Morseiul, and pledge my honour they shall come and go in safety, and without inquiry."

"Your honour, my Lord Count, is worth the city of Poitiers," replied the man. "There is the ring," and he gave it into the count's hand.

Albert de Morseiul took it, and gazed at it by the fire-light for a moment with some attention and with some emotion. It was formed of diamonds, and, according to a fashion common in that day, formed the initials, probably of some proper name, C. S., surmounted by a count's coronet.

"Lady," he said, after he had looked at it, "this ring is almost as strong a temptation to me as to our friends here. I long to keep it till its fair owner, once more at liberty, may come to claim it at my hands. That would be ungenerous, however, and so I suppose I must give it back."

So saying, he replaced it on her finger, and, with an air of courteous gallantry, raised the small fair hand to his lips. She bent down her head over her hand and his, as if to gaze at the recovered ring, and he felt a warm drop fall from the bright eyes that sparkled through the mask upon it.

"And now," he said, turning to the man who had acted as chief of the band, "and now you will let the ladies depart?"

"Yes," replied the man; "but one of our people must

drive them to the place where we tied the lackeys to the trees."

"They are safe, upon your honour, though?" said the count.

"Upon my honour they are," answered the man, bluffly. "I should like to see the man that would wag a finger at them when I say they are free."

"Come then, quick," said the count, turning to the ladies; "let us not lose the fortunate moment;" and he took her hand to lead her to the carriage, which he had remarked standing farther down the road. But both Pelisson and St. Helie threw themselves in his way, exclaiming aloud, "For God's sake do not leave us! For Heaven's sake do not abandon us!"

"No, no," replied the count. "My good friends," he added, turning to the band, "pray offer these good gentlemen no wrong, at least till my return. Perhaps I can hit upon some terms between you and them, and also tell you a piece of news which will make you change your determination."

"Not easily," said the leader; "but we will not harm them till you come back, if you are only going to take the ladies to the carriage. You, Stephen, drive it to the place where the lackeys were left."

"I will return instantly," said the count; and he led the younger lady on, the elder following. Till they reached the carriage, and during a part of the time occupied in tying the horses again to it, all were silent; but at length the younger lady ventured to say, in a low voice,

"How can I ever thank you, Monsieur de Morseiul?"

The count did not reply to the question, but he said, as he was handing her in,

"Am I not right? Have we not met before?"

"It is years ago," she said, in the same low tone; "but," she added, the moment after, just as the man was about to drive away, "we shall meet again; and if we do, say nothing of this meeting, I beseech you; but remember only that I am deeply grateful."

The carriage drove away, and the count remained for a moment listening. He then returned to the mixed group by the fire, where the agitation of terror in the case of the Abbé de St. Helie had worked itself up to such a pitch during his absence, that the tears were streaming copiously from the unhappy man's eyes

while the band that had made him a captive stood round gazing upon him with some contempt, but certainly no appearance of pity. Pelisson, on his part, displayed a greater degree of firmness, remaining with his hands clasped together, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, but without any other sign of fear than some paleness of his countenance, and an occasional movement of the lips, as if he were in prayer.

The count advanced into the midst of the group, and perceiving that the leader of the band into whose hands they had fallen looked to him to speak first, and maintained a dogged silence which augured but ill for the two ecclesiastics, he said, "Now, my good friend, what do you intend to do with these gentlemen?"

"I intend," replied the man, in a stern tone, "to shoot the two that are standing there without fail, to scourge that black-faced priest by the carriage till he has not a bit of skin on his back, and send the lackeys trooping."

"You are, of course, jesting," said the count. "You are not a man, I am sure, to commit deliberate murder. But you have frightened them enough. Let me hear what you intend to do, without a jest."

"There has been no jest spoken," replied the man, fiercely. "I have told you my intentions, and I shall not change. These two villains have come down into a peaceful province and among a happy people, to bring dissension, and persecution, and hatred among us, and they shall taste the first bitter fruits of their own works. I shall certainly not let them escape: and I can tell the old Jesuit Le Tellier, and his tyrant son Louvois, that they may send as many of such firebrands down as they will; I will do my best to meet them, and extinguish them in their own blood."

"I really do not know what you mean," replied the count. "Monsieur Pelisson, I cannot conceive, from what I know of you, that you are a man to undertake such evil tasks as this good gentleman accuses you of. We of the reformed religion certainly regretted that you had thought fit to fall back into what we consider to be a great error, but we never supposed that you would deal hardly with your reformed brethren."

"Neither do I, count," replied Pelisson, firmly. "It is natural that, having abandoned errors, I should seek to lead others to follow the same course; but no harsh means have I ever practised, no harsh means have I ever

counselled. On the contrary, I have advocated gentleness, peace, persuasion, exhortation, kindness, equity, on all occasions. But it is in vain, my good young gentleman," he added, looking at his captors, "it is all in vain. These men are determined to take our blood, and it is in vain to try to stay them; though the retribution which will fall upon them, and I fear, too, upon your own sect, will be awful when our fate reaches the ears of the king. But it is in vain, as I have said. You have done your best for us, and I thank you from my heart. Bear witness, every one!" he continued, raising his voice, "bear witness, every one, that this noble gentleman, the Count de Morseiul, has no share in the terrible act these men are going to commit, and that he has done his best to save us."

"No one will suspect me, Monsieur Pelisson," replied the count. "But I must yet do something more," he added, believing, not wrongly, that the words and demeanour of Pelisson must have had some effect upon the body of men by whom they were surrounded, and also having some hope now that aid might be at hand. "I must yet do something more, and the time, I believe, is come for doing it. Listen to me, sir," he added, addressing the man who had led the band throughout. "I beg of you instantly to set ~~these~~ two gentlemen at liberty. I beg of you, both for your own sake and for the sake of the reformed church, to which I belong, and to whose instigations this act will be attributed; and if you will not attend to my entreaties, you must attend to my command—I command you to set them at liberty!"

"Command!" said the man, with a scornful laugh. "Your commands are likely to be mighty potent here, in the green wood, Sir Count! Now listen to my commands to you. Make the best of your time, and get away from this spot without delay; for, if you stay, you shall either see those two men shot before your face, or you shall be shot with them. So be quick."

"Be it as you say, my good friend," replied the count, coolly. "We shall have bloody work of it; but, before you go on, remember, I tell you, you shall take my life with theirs; and let me warn you of another thing which you do not know; the first shot that is fired, the first loud word that is spoken," he added, dropping his voice, "will bring destruction on the heads of all."

The man to whom he spoke gazed in his face with some surprise, as if not clearly understanding his meaning, while the rest of the band appeared eagerly whispering together, in a manner which might be interpreted to bespeak some difference of opinion between themselves and their leader.

The ear of the count was quick; while conducting the two ladies to their carriage, he had heard uncertain sounds at a distance, which he had little doubted were occasioned by the arrival of some party from the castle in search of him: while he had spoken to the chief of the band in favour of Pelisson and his companions, he had again caught the same sounds, but more distinctly. He had heard voices, and the trampling of horse, and taking advantage of the momentary hesitation which seemed to affect his opponent, he exclaimed, "Hark!" and lifted up his hand to enjoin silence. The sounds, though distant, were now very distinct, and he added, "You hear! They are in search of me with all the force from the castle. You did not know that my servant was behind when I was taken, and fled to seek succour."

His opponent stamped his foot upon the ground, and laid his hand upon a pistol in his belt, fingering the hammer of the lock in a very ominous manner; but the count once more interposed, anxious on many accounts to prevent a collision.

"Come," he said, "I wish to do you no injury. Let us compromise the matter. Set the party you have taken free, and doubtless they will abandon to your care and guidance all the baggage and money that they may possess. What say you, Monsieur Pelisson?"

"Willingly, willingly," cried Pelisson, to whom all the last words spoken had been a relief.

"Willingly, willingly," cried the Abbé de St. Helie; the tears which had been streaming from fear changing suddenly into the tears of joy, and flowing on as rapidly as ever. Their enemy, however, seemed still to hesitate; but the taller man, whom we have before seen exercising some influence over him, pulled him by the sleeve once more, and whispered to him eagerly for a brief space. He listened to him for an instant, partly turning away his head, then shook himself pettishly free from his grasp, saying, "Well, I suppose it must be so. I will set them free now; but a day of reckoning will

come, if they take not a warning from what has passed. Gather all those things together, my men. Each one take something, and let us be off as fast as we can. Stand to your arms, though; stand to your arms, some of you. Those fellows are coming devilish near, and may find their way up here."

"They shall not injure you," said the count. "I break no engagements, even when only implied."

At that moment, however, the Abbé de St. Helie, having sufficiently recovered from the terror into which he had been cast to give some thought to what he was about, exclaimed aloud, "But the king's commission—the king's commission! They must not take that;" and, rushing towards the baggage, he seized a white leather bag, which seemed to contain some especial treasure; but scarcely had he got it in his hand when the chief of their captors snatched it violently from him, and dashed it into the midst of the fire, where he set his foot upon it, as if to ensure that it should be burned, even at the risk of injuring himself.

Albert de Morseiul was an officer in the king's service, and had been brought up in his youth with high notions of devoted loyalty and reverence for the royal authority, which even the free spirit of the reformed religion which he professed had not been able to diminish. The insult offered to the monarch's commission then struck him with indignation; and, starting forward, he grasped the man who would have destroyed it by the chest, exclaiming, "Sir, would you insult the king himself?"

The man replied not, but strove to keep down his foot upon the packet. The young count, however, was as powerful in frame as himself, and considerably taller; and, after a momentary struggle, he cast him back, while the Abbé de St. Helie snatched the packet from the flames.

What would have been the result of this strife, in which both the robber's blood and that of the young count were heated, would be difficult to say, for the man had drawn the pistol from his belt, and the click of the lock was plainly heard as he cocked it; but just at that minute the men who had been engaged in stripping the trunk mails of their contents caught a sight of a party of horsemen coming up the road; and, gathering everything that was most valuable together, they re-

treated quickly around their leader. Abandoning his contention with the count, he now promptly formed them into line, collected all the various articles belonging to themselves which were scattered about, and retreated in the direction of the opposite road, offering a firm face of five men abreast, with their carbines cocked, and levelled to the horsemen, who were now coming up thick into the open space where all these events had passed.

At the head of the horsemen appeared the Chevalier d'Evran, armed in haste to deliver or avenge his friend ; but, as the count saw that he was now master of the field, and that the robbers were retreating in a very threatening attitude, which might produce bloodshed if they were not immediately shown that no molestation would be offered to them, he took a rapid step or two forward, exclaiming to his own party,

"Halt, halt ! We have come to a compromise before you arrived, and are all at liberty. Thanks, Louis, a thousand thanks, however, for your succour !"

The count's men paused promptly at his command, and the robbers retreated slowly up the other road, facing round every ten or twelve steps, fully prepared for defence, like an old lion pursued by the hunters. In the mean while the chevalier sprung from his horse, and grasped his friend's hand eagerly.

"Why, Albert," he exclaimed, "Albert, this would never do ! You who, though one of the rashest officers in the service, had escaped balls and pikes, and bayonets and sabres, to run the risk of being killed by a ditch-fighting freebooter, within a mile or two of your own hearth ! Why, when that rascal Jerome there came and told me, I thought I should have gone mad ; but I was determined to ride the rascals down like wolves if I found they had injured you."

"Oh, no," replied the count, "they showed no inclination to injure me ; and, indeed, it would appear, as far as I am concerned, that the whole matter was a mistake, for to me they were very respectful. In truth, I seemed to be in wonderful favour with them, and my only difficulty was in saving M. Pelisson and this reverend gentleman here. But, notwithstanding these worthy men's reverence for myself, I must set to work to put this down as soon as ever I come back from Poitiers."

"I am sure, Monsieur le Comte," said the Abbé de St. Helie, "we owe you everything this night, and your conduct shall never be blotted out from our grateful remembrance."

The count bowed low, but somewhat stiffly; then, shaking Pelisson by the hand, he said, "I am happy to have been of any service to you both, gentlemen. My good friend, Monsieur Pelisson, I trust that you will not be any the worse for this short, though unpleasant, sojourn in the forest. I will not ask you and your friend to return and stop a while at the chateau of Morseiul, as in all probability Monsieur de St. Helie might not relish abiding under the roof of a heretic. But, besides that," he added, with a smile, "besides that, in regard to which, of course, I speak in jest, I doubt not you are anxious to proceed. Morseiul is out of your way, and in an hour and a half you will reach the auberge of Quatremoulins."

"But, sir, shall we be safe, shall we be safe?" exclaimed the Abbé de St. Helie, who was now examining the vehicle in which they had been travelling with anxious eyes. "Gracious God!" he exclaimed, ere the count could answer, "look! there is a ball which has gone through the carriage within an inch of my head!"

The Count de Morseiul looked at the chevalier, and they both laughed.

"There is a proverb in England, my good abbé," said the chevalier, "that a miss is as good as a mile; but, if you will take my advice, you will plant yourself just in the same spot again, or put your valise to raise you just opposite the shothole, for there are a thousand chances to one that, if you are shot at a thousand times, no bullet ever comes there again."

The abbé did not seem much to like the pleasantry, for in his mind the subject was far too serious a one to admit of a joke; and the Count de Morseiul replied to his former question, "Depend upon it, you are in perfect safety. But, to make that more sure, the chevalier and I will return to Morseiul with only one or two attendants, and send the rest of my men to escort you to the inn. However, gentlemen, if you will take my advice, you will not travel by night any more when you are in this part of the country; for, from what that fellow said, I should suppose the peasantry have got some evil notion of your intended proceedings here, and it

might be dangerous to trust yourselves with them too much. There ~~are~~ such things, you must remember, as shooting from behind hedges and from the tops of banks; and you must not forget that, in this part of the world, where our lanes are cut deep down between the fields, our orchards thick, and our woods many, it is no easy matter to ascertain where there is an enemy. As I take it for granted you are going towards Poitiers, Monsieur Pelisson, I shall most likely see you soon again. We will all accompany you out of the wood, and then you shall have a sufficient escort to ensure your safety."

Pelisson thanked him again and again. The trunk mails, and what portion of their contents the robbers had left, were gathered together, the carriage reloaded, and its human burden placed safely in it. Pelisson and the Abbé de St. Helie, after having ascertained that the injuries inflicted by the fire upon the precious packet in the sheepskin bag extended no farther than that outer cover, gave the word that they were ready; and, moving on in slow procession, the carriage, its denizens, and their escort of cavaliers made their exit from the road, after which the count and the chevalier took leave of the others to return to the castle of Morseiul; and thus ended the adventures of the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE JOURNEY, AND SOME OF ITS EVENTS.

WE will pass over all comments which took place among the parties to the scene which we described in our last chapter, and will take up our story again with the interval of a single day.

How happy would it often be for us in life if we could thus blot out a single day! if, out of our existence as out of our history, we could extirpate one four-and-twenty hours, its never-to-be-recalled deeds, its thoughts affecting the mind for ever, its events affecting the whole course of after-existence! How happy would it be if we could blot it out from being! and often, too often, how happy would it be if we could blot it out from

memory ; from memory, the treasurer of our joys and pains ; memory, whose important charge differs from the bright office of hope in the sad particular of having to deal with nothing but realities !

However, with the Count de Morseiul and his friend the Chevalier d'Evran, that day had passed in nothing which left regret. The count had explained to his friend that he judged it necessary to go to Poitiers at once : the chevalier had very willingly agreed to accompany him, saying that he would take the good old duke by surprise : they had then enjoyed everything that Morseiul afforded of enjoyable ; they had wandered by the glassy stream, they had ridden through the beautiful scenes around, they had hunted the boar in the count's green woods, they had tasted with moderation his good wine, and the rich fruits of a sunny land ; and thus that day had passed over without a cloud.

Although the King of France had given over, by this time, the habit with which he set out, in the light and active days of his first manhood, and no longer made all his journeys on horseback, yet the custom was kept up by a great part of his nobility and officers, and it was very usual to ride post upon a journey, that is to say, to mount whatever horse the postmaster chose to give, and ride on to the next relay, accompanied by a postilion on another horse, carrying the baggage. The Count de Morseiul, however, did not follow this plan, as he had no inclination to appear in the city of Poitiers, which at that time boasted of being the largest city in France, except Paris, in the character of a courier. As he loved not carriages, however, and had plenty of fiery horses in his stable panting for exercise, he sent forward a relay himself to a distant inn upon the road, and, on the morning we speak of, accompanied by his friend and a large body of their servants, rode calmly on upon the way, proposing to make a journey of about five-and-thirty miles that day.

"It is politic of me, D'Evran," he said, conversing with the chevalier, "it is politic of me to carry you away from Morseiul so soon ; as you have promised to give me one whole month, for fear you should become tired of your abode, and exhaust all its little stock of amusements and pleasures too rapidly. Satiety is a great evil, and surely one of the minor policies of life is to guard against it."

"No fear of my getting tired of Morseiul so soon," replied the chevalier; "but I cannot agree entirely to your view of satiety. I have often had many doubts as to whether it be really an evil or not."

"I have none," replied the count; "it seems to me the greatest of intellectual evils; it seems to me to be to the mind what despair is to the heart, and in the mind of a young man is surely what premature decrepitude is to the body. Good God, Louis, how can you entertain a doubt? The idea of losing one sense, one fine perception, is surely horrible enough; but tenfold horrible must be the idea of losing them all together; or, what comes to the same thing, of losing the enjoyment that they confer upon us?"

"Nay, but, Albert," said the chevalier, who was fond of playing with his own wit as a bright weapon, without considering its dangerous nature, and took no little pleasure in calling forth, even against himself, the enthusiastic eagerness of his friend; "nay, but, Albert, what I contend for is, that satiety is true wisdom; that it is a perfect, thorough knowledge of all enjoyments, and a proper estimation of their emptiness."

"Hold, hold," exclaimed the count, "that is a very different thing; to my mind satiety is the exhaustion of our own powers of enjoying, not the discovery of the want of a power of conferring enjoyment in other things. Because a man loses the sense of smelling, that will not deprive the rose of its sweet odour. Does a tyrant cut out my tongue? the delicious flavour of the peach will remain, though I taste it not; though he blind my eyes, the face of nature will flourish and look fair as much as ever. No, no, satiety is the deprivation, by over enjoyment, of our own powers of receiving, and not a just estimate of the powers of other things in giving pleasure."

"But you will own," said the chevalier, "that a deep and minute acquaintance with any source of enjoyment naturally tends to diminish the gratification that we at first received from it. You will not deny that moralist and philosopher, from Solomon down to our own days, have all been right in pointing out the vanity of all things. *Vanitas vanitatis*, my dear count, has been the stamp fixed by every great mind that the world has yet produced upon the objects of human enjoyment. This has been the acme, this the conclusion at which wisdom

has arrived; and surely the sooner we ourselves arrive at it in life the better."

"Heaven forbid," exclaimed the count; "Heaven forbid, either that it should be so, or that such should be your real and mature opinion. You say that a minute acquaintance with the sources of enjoyment diminishes the gratification they afford. There is undoubtedly something lost in every case of such minute acquaintance; but it is by the loss of a peculiar and distinct source of pleasure accompanying every other enjoyment the first time it is tasted, and never going beyond. I mean novelty; the bloom upon the ripe plum, which renders it beautiful to the eye as well as refreshing to the taste; brush away the bloom, the plum is no longer so beautiful, but the taste no less refreshing. Setting aside the diminution made for the loss of that novelty, I deny your position."

The chevalier laughed at his friend's eagerness.

"You will not surely deny, Morseiul," he said, "that there is no pleasure, no enjoyment, really satisfactory to the human heart; and, consequently, the more intimately we become acquainted with it, the more clearly do we see its emptiness."

"Had you said at the first," replied the count, "that our acquaintance with pleasures show their insufficiency, I should have admitted the truth of your assertion; but to discover the insufficiency of one pleasure seems to me only a step towards the enjoyment of pleasures of a higher quality."

"But we may exhaust them all," said the chevalier, "and then comes—what but satiety?"

"No," replied the count, "not satiety; aspirations for, and hopes of, higher pleasures still; the last, the grandest, the noblest seeking for enjoyment that the universe can afford; the pursuit that leads us through the gates of the tomb to those abodes where the imperfections of enjoyment end, where the seeds of decay grow not up with the flowers that we plant, where the fruit is without the husk, and the music without the dissonance. This still is left us when all other enjoyments of life are exhausted, or have been tasted, or have been cast away, or have been destroyed. Depend upon it, Louis, that even the knowledge we acquire of the insufficiency of earth's enjoyment gives us greater power to advance in the scale of enjoyment; and that,

if we choose to learn our lesson from the picture given us of the earthly paradise, we shall find a grand moral in the tree of eternal life having been planted by the tree of knowledge."

"But still, my dear count," replied the chevalier, "you seem still to approach to my argument, while you deny its force. If such be the result of satiety, as you say it is, namely, to lead us to the aspiration after higher enjoyments, till those aspirations point to another world, surely it is better to arrive at that result as soon as possible."

"No," replied the count; "in the first place, I did not say that such was the result of satiety; I said that it was the result of discovering by experience the insufficiency of all earthly enjoyments to give perfect satisfaction to a high and immortal spirit and well-regulated mind. Satiety I hold to be quite the reverse of this; I hold it to be the degradation of our faculties of enjoyment, either by excessive indulgence or by evil direction. The man who follows such a course of life as to produce any chance of reaching satiety, tends downward instead of upward, to lower rather than to higher pleasures, and exhausts his own capabilities, not the blessings of God. The opposite course produces the opposite result; we know and learn that all God's creations afford us some enjoyment, although we know and learn, at the same time, that it has been his will that none of those enjoyments upon earth should give complete and final satisfaction. Our capabilities of enjoying, by enjoying properly, are not blunted, but acuminated; we fly from satiety instead of approaching it; and, even while we learn to aspire to higher things, we lose not a particle of the power—except by the natural decay of our faculties—of enjoying even the slight foretaste that Heaven has given us here."

"Solomon, Solomon, Solomon!" said his companion, "Solomon was evidently a misanthrope either by nature or by satiety. He had seen everything under the sun, and he pronounced everything vanity; ay, lighter than vanity itself."

"And he was right," replied the count; "everything is lighter than vanity itself when comparing the things of this world with the things of eternity. But you know," he added, with a smile, "that we Huguenots, as you call us, acknowledge no authority against the clear

operation of reason, looking upon no man as perfect but one. If you were to tell me that it was right to put a friend in a dangerous place, where he was sure to be killed, for the purpose of marrying his widow, I should not a bit more believe that it was right because David had done it; and even if you were to prove to me that, through the whole writings of Solomon, there was not, as I believe there is, a continual comparison between earthly things and heavenly things, I should still say that you were in the wrong; the satiety that he felt being a just punishment upon him for the excesses he committed and the follies to which he gave way, and by no means a proof of his wisdom any more than those follies and excesses themselves. Long before we have exhausted the manifold pleasures which Heaven has given us here by moderate and virtuous enjoyment; long before we have even discovered by experience the insufficiency of one half that we may properly enjoy, the span of man's life is finished; and at the gates of death he may think himself happy, if, while he has learned to desire the more perfect enjoyment of heavenly things, he has not rendered himself unfit for that enjoyment, by having depraved his faculties to satiety by excess."

"Well, well," said the chevalier, seeing that his friend spoke earnestly, "I am afraid I must give up Solomon, Albert. If I remember right, the man had some hundreds of wives or so; and I am sure he might well cry out that all is vanity after that. I wonder they did not all fall upon him at once, and smother him under looking-glasses and bonbonnières."

The count saw that his friend turned the matter into a joke, and, from his long acquaintance with him, he doubted not that he had been carrying on the discussion from first to last for sport. He was not angry or cross about it; but, of an eager and of an earnest disposition, he could not play with subjects of value, like an unconscious child tossing jewels to and fro, and he remained thoughtful for some time. While the chevalier continued to jest upon a thousand things, sometimes connecting one joke with another in rapid and long succession, sometimes pausing for a moment or two, and taking his next subject from any accidental circumstance in their ride or feature in the scene around, the count gradually resumed the conversation upon indifferent matters.

Having only in view, however, in any extracts that we may give from their conversation, either to forward the progress of their history or to display the peculiar character of each, we shall dwell no longer upon their words during the rest of the ride to a little village some seventeen miles from the chateau, where they stayed a moment to water their horses. The count was looking down, watching the animals drink ; but the chevalier, who was gazing at everything in the place, suddenly exclaimed,

"Surely there cannot be two such ugly heads as that in France ! The Abbé Pelisson, as I live ! Why, Monsieur Pelisson," he exclaimed, advancing till he was directly under the window from which the head of the abbé was protruded, "how have you stuck here by the way !"

"Alas ! my good sir," replied the abbé, "the fright of the day before yesterday had such an effect upon my companion, De St. Helie, that he was quite unable to proceed. He is better this afternoon, and we shall set out in an hour, after he has taken something to refresh him and give him strength."

"You will overtake us at our next lodging," said the chevalier.

"Oh no, we shall pass you far," replied the abbé. "We shall still have five hours' light, and, as we travel by post, we may calculate upon going between five and six miles an hour."

The count, on his part, made no comment, but merely **nodded** his head to Pelisson ; and when the chevalier's brief conversation was at an end, they rode on. The village which they had fixed upon for their resting-place that night was a large, straggling, open collection of houses, which had grown up on either side of the wide road, simply because it happened to be at a convenient distance from many other places. The buildings were scattered, and separated by large gardens or courts, and the inn itself was in fact the only respectable dwelling in the place, having been an old brick-built country-seat in former days, with the walls that defended it from attack still standing round the court, the windows rattling and quivering with the wind and their antiquity, the rooms wide and lofty, and perhaps a little cheerless, and the kitchen, which formed the entrance, as black as the smoke of many generations could render it.

The whole house was prepared to meet the Count de Morseiul, his coming having been announced by the servants sent on with the horses; and did ducks and fowls in various countries write the histories of their several races, that morning would have been memorable for the massacre that took place, and only be comparable to the day of St. Bartholomew. But the culinary art was great in France then as it is now, and the cook, knowing that she had a difficult task to perform, exerted her utmost ingenuity to render tough poultry tender, and insipid viands savoury, for the distinguished guest that was to dine and sleep within those walls. Though the preparations had been begun at an early hour, yet they were by no means concluded when the party arrived; and while Jerome Riquet plunged into the kitchen, and communicated to the cook a thousand secrets from the vast stores of his own mind, the count and his friend gazed forth from the window of a high, wide, square-shaped room over the wide prospect, which lay in gentle undulations beneath their eyes, with the road that they themselves had just passed, taking, as it were, a standing leap over each of the little hills that it met with in its way.

The day had been remarkably fine during the earlier portion thereof, but towards three o'clock clouds had come over, not indeed veiling the sky under a sheet of sombre gray, but fleeting lightly across the blue expanse, like the momentary cares of infancy, and passing away after dropping a few large tears, which the joyful sun dried up again the moment after. As the count and his friend gazed forth, however, a heavier shower was seen sweeping over the prospect; the sky became quite covered; a gray mist—through which, however, a yellow gleam was seen, saying that the summer night was not far off—advanced over wood and field, and hill and dale, and, dashing down with all the impetuous and shortlived fury of an angry boy, the cloud poured forth its burden on the earth. While yet it was raging in its utmost wrath, the plain carriage of Pelisson and his companions was seen rolling slowly onward towards the village, with coachman and lackey holding down the drenched head towards the storm, and shading the defenceless neck. All the windows of the vehicle were closed, in order, if possible, to keep out the wind and rain; but, constructed as carriages were in those days,

there was no great protection to be found in them from the breath or the drops of heaven; and, as the rumbling vehicle approached the village, the head of Pelisson was seen suddenly thrust forth on the safest side, shouting something to the coachman, who seemed inclined to go through all the signs in the subjunctive mood of the verb *not to hear*. After repeating three times his words, the abbé drew his head in again, and the carriage entered the village.

"For a hundred louis," said the chevalier, "we have the company of Messieurs Pelisson and St. Helie to-night. I beseech thee, Albert, tell them they cannot lodge here, if it be but to see their rueful faces. Look, look! There comes the vehicle, like the ark of Noah, discovered by some fortunate chance on Ararat, and set upon the wheels of Pharaoh's chariot, fished out of the Red Sea. Where could they have picked up such an antediluvian conveyance? Look, the ark stops! Now open the window, Noah. Out comes the door!" and, as he spoke, he had matter for more merriment, for the first person that issued forth was the fat, black-faced priest in his greasy cassock. "The raven! The raven!" shouted the chevalier, laughing aloud. "What beast next, count! What beast next?"

"Hush, hush! Louis," said his friend, in a lower tone; "they will hear you, and it is a pity to give pain."

"True, oh most sapient Albert," answered the chevalier, "and you shall see how courteous I can be. I will even take the raven by the claw, if you give me but time to order a basin and napkin in the adjoining room for the necessary ablution afterward. Oh, Monsieur Pelisson, enchanted to see you!" he continued, as the abbé entered the room; "Monsieur de St. Helie, this is indeed delightful; Monsieur de Beaumanoir, allow me to take you by the hand," he added, advancing towards the greasy priest.

"You mistake me for some one else," said the priest, drawing slightly back, turning his shoulder, and speaking through his teeth like a muzzled bear: "I am the Curé de Guadrioul."

"True, true, I forgot," went on the chevalier, in the same mild way. "Enchanted to see you, Monsieur le Curé de Guadrioul! How much we are bound to laud and love this shower for having given us the felicity of your society."

"I am sure I have no cause to laud it," said the priest, "for all the rain has come in at that crazy window, and run into my neck, besides drenching my soutane."

The chevalier might have gone on for an hour, but the count came to the relief of the poor priest. He notified to Pelisson and his companions that the house and all that it contained had been engaged by him, but he pressed them to remain as his guests so cordially, that Monsieur de St. Helie, who—though he loved not Huguenots, loved damp weather worse and savoury viands more—consented readily, warned by the rising odours from the kitchen that he might certainly go farther and fare worse. Chambers were found for the new guests, and, before an hour had passed, the whole party was seated at a groaning board, the plentiful supply on which made Monsieur de St. Helie open his eyes with well satisfied astonishment. We are not quite sure, indeed, that he did not feel a greater respect for Protestantism than he had ever felt before; and so placable and mild had he evidently become, that the chevalier whispered to his friend, while apparently speaking of something else, "For Heaven's sake, Morseiul, never suffer your people to give that man such a feast again! Three such dinners would make him condemn his own soul and turn heretic."

Pelisson was cheerful as usual, mild and gentle, a little plausible perhaps, and somewhat too courtier-like, but still rendering himself most agreeable, both by his manner and by a sort of indescribable ease and grace in his conversation and language. Behind the chair of the count, as a sort of nomenclator of the different dishes, had placed himself worthy Maître Jerome Riquet. Now Heaven knows that no person was naturally more simple in his tastes than Albert of Morseiul; but he had left, as usual, all the minor arrangements of his comfort to others, and certainly Jerome Riquet, as soon as he heard that two Catholic abbés and a priest were about to dine at the table of his master, had not relaxed in any of his efforts to excel all excellence, determined to astound the ecclesiastics by the luxury and splendour of a country inn. Had it produced nothing but parchment and jack-boots, Jerome Riquet would have discovered means of sending in entrée upon entrée in various forms and under various different names. But as it was, notice of the count's coming having been given

the day before, and vast preparations made by the worthy aubergiste, the suppers of Versailles were little more refined than that to which Pelisson and his companions now sat down; while, according to Jerome's directions, two servants stood behind every chair, and the count was graced by his own additional presence at the right elbow.

Riquet himself had not only taken up that position as the *pièce de résistance*, but as the *pièce de parade*, and, as was not customary then, he mingled with what was going forward at table when it suited him. Often, by a happy exhortation upon some dish or observation upon some wine, he contrived to turn the conversation in a different direction when it was proceeding in a way that did not please him. About half way through the meal, however, his attention seemed to be caught by something awkward in the position of the Curé de Guadrioul, and from time to time he turned a sort of anxious and inquiring glance towards him, wondering whether he sat so high in his chair from the natural conformation of short legs and a long body, or from some adventitious substance placed beneath his nether man.

He made various movements to discover it; but, in the mean time, the conversation went on, and the count, having been naturally drawn by the observation of some other person to pay Pelisson a compliment upon his graceful style, the abbé replied, "Oh, my style is nothing, Monsieur le Comte, though you are good enough to praise it; and besides, after all, it is but style. I had a brother once, poor fellow!" he added, "who might, indeed, have claimed your praise; for, in addition to a good style, which he possessed in an infinitely higher degree than myself, he had a peculiar art of speaking briefly, which, Heaven knows, I have not, and of leaving nothing unsaid that could be said upon the subject he treated. When he was only nineteen years of age he was admitted to the academy of Castres; but, upon his admission, they made this singular and flattering condition with him, namely, that he should never speak upon any subject till everybody else had spoken; 'for,' said the academicians, 'when he speaks first, he never leaves anybody else anything to say upon the subject; and when he speaks last, he finds a thousand things to say that nobody else has said.' Besides all this," he continued, "my brother had another great and inestimable advantage over me."

"Pray what was that?" demanded the count.

"He was not hideous," replied Pelisson.

"Oh, I do not think that such an advantage," said the chevalier. "It is the duty of a woman to be handsome; but I think men have a right to be ugly, if they like."

"So say I," replied Pelisson; "but Mademoiselle de Scudery says that I abuse the privilege, and, upon my word, I think so; for, just before I came from Paris, something happened which is worth telling. I was walking along," he continued, "quite soberly and thoughtfully down the Rue de Beauvoisis—you know that little street that leads up by the Convent of St. Mary—when, coming opposite to a large house nearly at the corner, I was suddenly met by as beautiful a creature as ever I saw, with her soubrette by her side and her loup in her hand, so that I could quite see her face. She was extremely well dressed, and, in fact, altogether fit to be the Goddess of an Idyl. However, as I did not know her, I was passing quietly on, when suddenly she stopped, took me by the hand, and said, in an earnest voice, 'Do me the pleasure, sir, of accompanying me for one moment.' On my word, gentlemen, I did not know what was going to happen, but I was a great deal too gallant, of course, to refuse her; when, without another word, she led me to the door of the house, up the stairs, rang the bell on the first floor, and conducted me into an anteroom. A servant threw open another door for her; and then, bringing me into a second room, where I found a gentleman of good mien with two sticks in his hand, she presented me to him with these singular words: '*Line for line, sir, like that! Remember, line for line, sir, like that!*' and then, turning on her heel, she walked away, leaving me petrified with astonishment. The gentleman in whose presence I stood seemed no less surprised for a moment than myself; but, the instant after, he burst into a violent fit of laughter, which made me a little angry.

"'Pray, sir, what is the meaning of all this?' I asked. 'Do you not know that lady?' he rejoined. 'No, sir,' I replied, 'I neither know her nor you.' 'Oh, as for me,' replied the gentleman, 'you have seen me more than once before, Monsieur Pelisson, though you do not know me. I am Mignard, the painter; but as to the lady, I must either not give you the clew to her bringing you here, or not give you her name, which you like.'

'Give me the clew; give me the clew,' replied I: 'the lady's name I will find out hereafter.'

"Do not be offended, then," he said, 'but the truth is, I am painting for that lady a picture of the temptation in the wilderness. She came to see it this morning, and a violent dispute arose between us as to how I was to represent the devil; she contending that he was to be excessively ugly, and I that, though disfigured by bad passions, there was to be the beauty of an angel fallen. She left me a minute ago in a fit of playful pettishness, when, lo and behold, she returns almost instantly, bringing you in her hand, and saying, "Line for line, like that." I leave you to draw your own conclusion.'

"I did draw my own conclusion," continued Pelisson, "and got out of the way of Monsieur Mignard's brush as fast as possible, only saying that I thought the lady very much in the wrong, for there could lie no great temptation under such an exterior as mine."

His auditors laughed both at the story and at the simplicity with which it was told, and no one laughed more heartily than the black-faced priest. But, while he was chuckling on his seat, Maître Jerome, who had glided round behind him, suddenly seized hold of two leathern strings that hung down over the edge of the chair, and exclaiming, "That must be very inconvenient to your reverence," he pulled out from underneath him, by a sudden jerk which nearly laid him at his length on the floor, the identical sheepskin bag which had nearly been burned to pieces in the wood.

The priest started up with terror and dismay, exclaiming, "Give it to me, give it to me, sirrah. How dare you take it from under me? It is the king's commission to Messieurs Pelisson and St. Helie for putting down heresy in Poitou."

A sudden grave look and a dead silence succeeded this unexpected announcement; but while the priest snatched the packet from Jerome Riquet's profane hands, declaring that he had promised not to part with it for a moment, Pelisson made his voice heard, saying,

"You mistake, my good brother; such is not the object of the commission, as the king explained it to me. On the contrary, his majesty said that, when it was opened at Poitiers, we would find that the whole object and scope of it was to heal the religious differences of

the province in the mildest and most gentle manner possible."

"I trust it may be found so, Monsieur Pelisson," replied the count, gravely, turning his eyes from the Abbé de St. Helie, who said nothing. "I trust it may be found so;" and though it was evident that some damp was thrown upon his good spirits, he turned the conversation courteously and easily to other subjects; while Jerome Riquet, satisfied in regard to the nature of the packet, made a thousand apologies to the Curé of Guadrioul, loaded his plate with delicacies, and then returned to his master's elbow.

After supper, for so the meal was then called, the party separated. The Chevalier d'Evran, for motives of his own, attached himself closely, for the time being, to the Abbé de St. Helie, and engaged him in a party at trick-track; the young count strolled out in the evening light with Pelisson, both carefully avoiding any religious subjects from the delicacy of their mutual position; the fat priest went to gossip with Maître Jerome, and smoke a pipe in the kitchen of the inn; and the serving-men made love to the village girls, or carolled in the courtyard.

Thus ended the first day's journey of the Count de Morseiul towards Poitiers. On the following morning he had taken his departure before the ecclesiastics had risen, leaving the servants, who were to follow with the horses, to make them fully aware that they had been his guests during their stay at the inn; and on the third day, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, he came under the high rocky banks which guard the entrance to the ancient city which was to be the end of his journey.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LADY AND HER LOVERS.

THE city of Poitiers is a beautiful old town, at least it is a town in which there is much to interest; the memories of many remote periods cross and intersect each other, like the arches of a Gothic church, forming

a fretwork overhead of varied and solemn, though dim associations. The Roman, and the Goth, and the Frank, and the Englishman, have all there left indelible traces of their footsteps; and each spot through the streets of that city, and through the neighbouring country, is shadowed or brightened by the recollection of great and extraordinary deeds in the past. There is something in it, also, unlike any other town in the world; the number and extent of its gardens, the distance between its various houses, would make it look more like an orchard than like a town, did not every here and there rise up some striking edifice, some fine church, bearing in its windows the leopards or the fleurs-de-lis, as the case may be; a town-house, a broken citadel, or a Roman amphitheatre in ruins, and all amid rich green gardens, and grapes, and flowering shrubs.

The Count de Morseuil and his train, after passing the gates of the city, which were then duly watched and warded, rode on to the house of the governor, which was at that time in the great square. It had probably been a Roman building, of which part of the portico had been preserved, forming the end of one of the wings; for, during three or four centuries, a tall porch had remained there supported by three columns. Though the principal gate was in the centre of the house, it was usual for the people of the town to enter by this porch; and such was the only purpose that it served. The whole aspect of the place has been altered long since; the governor's house has been changed into an inn, where I have slept on more than one occasion; and of the three columns nothing more remains but the name, which has descended to the hotel. It was in that time, however, a large brick building, with an immense arched gateway in the centre, under which Goliath of Gath himself might have passed on horseback with a feather in his cap. Beyond this was the inner court, with the usual buildings around it, but upon a large and magnificent scale; and on the left, under the archway, rose a wide flight of stone steps, leading to the principal apartments above.

Throughout the whole town, and especially in the neighbourhood of the governor's house, there appeared, on the day of the count's arrival, a greater degree of bustle and activity than Poitiers generally displays; and as he drew up his horse under the archway to ascend

the stairs, several peasant girls, after pausing to look at the cavaliers, passed on into the courts beyond, loaded with baskets full of flowers, and fruit, and green branches.

As he had sent on a messenger the day before to announce his approach, the Count de Morseiul knew that he was expected; and it was evident, from the sudden rushing forth of all the servants, the rapid and long ringing of the great bell which went up stairs, and a thousand other such signs, that orders had been given to treat him with especial distinction. While some of the masters of the stable took possession of his grooms and horseboys, to show them to the place appointed for them, two other servants, in costumes which certainly did honour to the taste of M. le Marquis Auguste de Hericourt, marshalled the count and the chevalier—followed by their respective valets and pages, without which men of their rank and fortune travelled not in that day—to the vestibule at the top of the staircase.

A step beyond the door of the vestibule, which was a step also beyond what etiquette required, the governor of the province was already waiting to receive the Count de Morseiul. He was a frank, amiable, and kind-hearted old gentleman, as tall, and as thin, and as brown as a cypress-tree; and, grasping the count's hand, he welcomed him to Poitiers as an old friend, and likewise, perhaps we might say, as one whose high character and fame as a soldier he greatly and sincerely admired. While speaking to the count so eagerly that he saw nothing else, the governor felt a hand laid upon his arm, and, turning, beheld the chevalier, whom he welcomed also warmly, though in a peculiar tone of intimacy which he had not used towards the Count de Morseiul.

"Ah, D'Evrant," he said, "what brought you here, mad boy! I wanted not to see you; but I can tell you I shall put you in a garret, as you deserve, for the house is filled to the doors. This is our first grand reception, our little provincial *appartement*. All the nobility in the neighbourhood are flocking in, and, as we cannot lodge them all, we are obliged to begin our entertainment as early as possible, in order to suffer some of them to get home betimes. This must plead my apology, my dear count, for not giving you more spacious apartments yourself, and for not taking you at once to the duchess, who is all anxiety to see our hero. Some refreshments

shall be taken to you in your own apartment, to your little saloon, where, perhaps, you will give a corner to this wild chevalier; for there is that young puppy Hericourt, who only arrived last night, up to the elbows in the dining-room in all sort of finery and foolery."

"But where is la belle Clémence?" demanded the chevalier. "Where is the beauty of beauties! Will she not give me a quarter of an hour in her boudoir, think you, duke?"

"Get along with you," replied the duke: "Clémence does not want to see you. Go and refresh yourself with the count: by that time we shall have found a place to put you in; and when you have cast off your dusty apparel, ransacked the perfumers, sought out your best lace, and made yourself look as insupportably conceited as you used to do two years ago at Versailles, it will be time for you to present yourself in our reception-room, and there you can see Clémence, who, I dare say, will laugh at you to your heart's content."

"So be it, so be it," replied the chevalier, with a well-satisfied air. "Come, count, we must obey the governor: see if he do not make himself as despotic here as his majesty in Paris. Which is our way, Monsieur de Rouvré?" and with that appearance of indifference which has always been a current sort of affectation with men of the world, from the days of Horace downward, he followed the servants to the handsome apartments prepared for the Count de Morseiul, which certainly needed no apology.

On the table the count found a packet of letters which M. de Rouvré had brought for him from Paris. They contained nothing of any great importance, being principally from old military companions; but, after the chevalier had taken some refreshments with him, and retired to the apartments which had been prepared in haste for him, the count took up the letters, and, carried forward by the memory of old times, went on reading, forgetful of the necessity of dressing himself for the approaching fête. He promised himself little or no pleasure indeed therein, for he expected to see few, if any, with whom he was acquainted; and his mind was too deeply occupied with important and even painful subjects for him to think of mingling in lighter scenes with any very agreeable sensations.

He did not remember, then, the necessity of prepara-

tion till he had to call for lights, and heard the roll of carriage-wheels, and the clattering of horses. He then, however, hastened to repair his forgetfulness; but Jerome was not as prompt and ready as usual, or else he was far more careful of his master's appearance. We will not, indeed, pause upon all the minute points of his toilet; but certainly, by the time that the valet would acknowledge that his master was fit to go down, he had given to the count's fine person every advantage that dress can bestow; and perhaps Albert of Morseuil did not look at all the worse for that air of high and thoughtful intelligence which the deep interests whereon his mind was fixed called up in a countenance, with the fine and noble features of which that expression was so peculiarly suited.

When at length he entered the little saloon that had been allotted to him, he found one of the officers of the governor waiting, with his own page, to conduct him to the reception-rooms; and, on asking if the chevalier was ready, he found that he had been there seeking him, and had gone down. It was a slight reproach for his tardiness, and the count hastened to follow. The way was not long, but the stairs had been left somewhat dark, as but little time had been given for preparation, and when the doors were opened for the young count, a blaze of light and a scene of magnificence burst upon his eyes which he had not been prepared to see in that remote part of France.

The rooms were brilliantly, though softly, lighted, and the principal blaze came from the great saloon at the farther end. Rich hangings and decorations were not wanting; but, as they were, of course, to be procured with greater difficulty than in Paris, the places where many draperies would have hung, or where gilded scrolls, trophies, and other fanciful embellishments would have appeared, were filled up with much better taste from the storehouses of nature; and garlands, and green boughs, and the multitude of flowers which that part of the country produces, occupied every vacant space. A very excellent band of musicians, which the duke had brought with him from the capital, was posted in an elevated gallery of the great saloon; and the sweet notes of many popular melodies of the day came pouring down the long suite of apartments, softened, but not rendered indistinct, by the distance. In the first cham-

ber which the count entered were a great number of the inferior officers of the governor, in their dresses of ceremony, giving that antechamber an air of almost regal state; and through the midst of them was passing, at the moment, a party of the high nobles of the province, who had just arrived before the count came in.

Though not above one half of the invited had yet appeared, there were numerous groups in every part of the rooms; and at more than one of the tables, which, as customary in that age, were set out for play, the young count found persons whom he knew, and stopped to speak with them as he advanced. The Duke and Duchess de Rouvré had taken their station in the great saloon; but in the smaller saloon immediately preceding it, Albert de Morseiul paused by one of the tables to speak to the Prince de Marsillac, who was leaning against it; not playing, but turning his back with an air of indifference upon the scene beyond.

"Ah, Monsieur de Morseiul," he said, "it is an unexpected pleasure to see you here; I thought you were in Flanders."

"I was so fourteen days ago," replied the count, "but as little did I expect to see you."

"Oh, this is in some sort my native country," replied the prince; "and, being here upon family affairs, I could not, of course, hesitate to come and grace the first entertainment of the good duke. There seems a promise of a goodly assembly; and, indeed, there are attractions enough, what between a new governor, a new governess, and Clémence de Marly."

"And, pray, who is Clémence de Marly?" demanded the count. "I am a rustic, you see, and have never yet heard of her."

"Rustic, indeed!" said the prince; "why all the Parisian world is mad about her. She is the most admired, the most adored, I may say, of all the stars, or comets, or what not, that have appeared in my day; as beautiful as Hebe, as graceful as the brightest of the Graces, as proud as Juno, about ten times colder than Diana, and as witty as Madame de Cornuel. People began to fancy that the king himself was in love with her; only you know that now, under the domination l'Amie de l'Amie, those days of folly and scandal have gone by, and, on my word, the saucy beauty treated

majesty no better than she does nobility. I myself heard her—"

"But who is Clémence de Marly?" demanded the count again; "you have not satisfied me, Marsillac. Of what race or family is she? I know of no such name or family connected with the Rouvrés."

The prince replied in a lower tone, "She is an orphan, a foundling, an anything you like. Some say," he added, in a whisper, "a natural child of the king's own; but others again, and this is the true story, say that she is a natural child of De Rouvré. There was a tale some time ago, you know, before he married, about him and the Countess de —, a person of very large fortune; and as this girl has wealth at command, and lives always with the Rouvrés, there can be no doubt of the matter. Madame de Rouvré, having no family, wisely treats her as her child, and spoils her as if she were her grandchild. They used to say she was to be married to your friend the Chevalier d'Évran, whom I saw hanging at her elbow just now. Hericourt vows that he will cut the throat of any man who marries her without his consent; but Louvois is supposed to have laid out a match for her even nearer to his race than that; Segnelia is not without hopes of carrying off the prize for some of his people; and they seem in these days to care no more for the bend sinister than if the Adam and Eve laws still prevailed, and we were all the children of nature together."

"This is the fair lady that D'Évran has been talking to me about," replied the count; "but he talked of her and her beauty so coolly that I can scarcely suppose he is much in love."

"Just come round hither and look at him then," said Marsillac, moving a little farther down, so as to give a fuller view into the other room. "You know D'Évran's way of being in love; lying down upon a sofa and playing with a feather fan, while the lady stands at the distance of two yards from him, and he says more clever things to her in five minutes than anybody else can say in an hour. There he is doing it even now."

The count moved slowly into the place which Marsillac had left for him, so as not to attract attention by flagrant examination of what was going on, and then raised his eyes towards the part of the great saloon at which the prince had been looking. The group that

they lighted on was certainly, in every respect, a singular one. In the centre of it stood, or rather leaned, beside a high-backed chair, in an attitude of the most perfect grace that it is possible to conceive, which could not have been studied, for there was ease and nature in every line, a young lady, apparently of one or two-and-twenty years of age, whose beauty was both of a very exquisite and a very singular cast. It fully justified the description which had been given of it by the Chevalier d'Evran; the eyes were deep blue, but fringed with long and dark lashes, thick set but smooth, and sweeping in one even, graceful fringe. The lips were, indeed, twin roses; the complexion delicately fair, and yet the face bearing in the cheek the warm hue of undiminished health. Those lips, even when not speaking, were always a little, a very little parted, showing the bright pearl-like teeth beneath; the brow was smooth and fair, and yet the eyebrow, which marked the exact line of the forehead above the eyes, changed, by the slightest elevation or depression, the whole aspect of the countenance with every passing emotion. With every change, too, the other features harmonized, and there was a bright sparkliness about the face, even at that distance, which made it, to the eyes of the count, resemble a lovely landscape in an early summer morning, where everything seems fresh life and brightness. The ear, too, which was slightly turned towards them, was most beautiful; and the form, though the dress of that day did not serve to expose it much, was seen swelling through the drapery in every line of exquisite beauty. The hand, the arm, the foot, the neck and throat, were all perfect as any sculptor could have desired to model; and the whole, with the grace of the attitude and the beauty of the expression, formed an object that one might have well wished to look at for long hours.

On the right of the lady, precisely as the prince had described him, lay the Chevalier d'Evran, richly dressed, and, perhaps, affecting a little more indifference than he really felt. Half kneeling, half sitting at her feet was the Marquis de Hericourt, saying nothing, but looking up in her face with an expression which plainly implied that he was marvelling whether she or himself were the loveliest creature upon earth. On her left hand stood a gentleman, whom the count instantly recognised as one of the highest and most distinguished

nobles of the court of Louis XIV., several years older than either the marquis or the chevalier, but still apparently as much, if not more, smitten than either. Behind her and round about her, in various attitudes, were half a dozen others, each striving to catch her attention for a single moment; but it was to the elder gentleman whom we have mentioned that she principally listened, except, indeed, when some witticism of the chevalier caused her to turn and smile upon him for a moment. Among the rest of the little train behind her were two personages, for neither of whom the Count de Morseiul entertained any very great esteem: the Chevalier de Rohan, a ruined and dissipated scion of one of the first families in France, and a gentleman of the name of Hatréoumont, whom the count had known while serving with the army in Flanders, and who, though brave as a lion, bore such a character for restless and unprincipled scheming, that the count had soon reduced their communication to a mere passing bow.

All the rest of those who surrounded her were distinguished as far as high station and wealth went, and many were marked for higher and better qualities; but, in general, she seemed to treat them all as mere slaves, sending one hither with a message, and another thither for something that she wanted, with an air of proud command, as if they were born but to obey her will.

The group was, as we have said, an interesting and a curious one; but what was there in it that made the Count de Morseiul turn deadly pale? What was there in it that made his heart beat with feelings which he had never known before in gazing at any proud beauty of this world? What was it made him experience different sensations towards that lady, the first time that he beheld her, from those which he had ever felt towards others?

Was it the first time that he had ever beheld her? Oh, no. There, though the features were somewhat changed by the passing of a few years; though the beauty of the girl had expanded into the beauty of the woman; though the form had acquired roundness and *contour* without losing one line of grace; there, in that countenance and in that form, he beheld again the dream of his young imagination; there he saw her of whom he had thought so often, and with whose image he had sported in fancy, till the playfellow of his imagination had become

the master of his feelings : and now that he did see her, he saw her in a situation and under circumstances that gave him pain. All the beauty of person, indeed, which he had so much admired was there ; but all those charms of the heart and of the mind, which his fancy had read in the book of that beauty, seemed now reversed, and he saw but a spoiled, proud, lovely girl, apparently as vain and frivolous as the rest of a vain and frivolous court.

"You are silent long, De Morseiul," said the Prince de Marsillac ; "you are silent very long. You seem among the smitten, my good friend. What ! shall we see the fair lands and chateaux of the first Protestant gentleman in France laid at the feet of yon pretty dame ? Take my advice, Morseiul ; take the advice of an elder man than yourself. Order your horses to be saddled early to-morrow morning, and get you back to your castle or to the army. Even if she were to have you, Morseiul, she would never suit you : her heart, man, is as cold as a Russian winter, and as hard as the nether millstone, and never in this world will she love any other thing but her own pretty self."

"I am not at all afraid of her," replied the count ; "I have seen her before, and was only admiring the group around her."

"Seen her and forgotten her !" exclaimed Marsillac, "so as not to remember her when I spoke of her ! In the name of Heaven, let her not hear that. Nay, tell it not at the court, if you would maintain your reputation for wit, wisdom, and good taste. But I suppose, in fact, you are as cold as she is. Go and speak to her, Morseiul ; go and speak to her, for I see, indeed, you are quite safe."

"Not I, indeed," said the count ; "I shall go and speak to the duke and his excellent lady : and I suppose, in time, shall have to go through all sorts of necessary formalities with la belle Clémence ; but, till it is needful, I have no inclination to increase any lady's vanity who seems to have so much of it already."

Thus saying, he turned away, only hearing the prince exclaim, "O mighty Sybarite !" and, moving with easy grace through the room, he advanced into the great saloon, cast his eyes round the whole extent, looking for the duke and duchess, and passing over la belle Clémence and her party with a mere casual glance, as if he

scarcely saw or noticed her. There was an immediate whisper in the little group itself; several of those around took upon them to tell her who he was, and all eyes followed him as with the same calm and graceful, but somewhat stately steps he advanced to the spot where the duke and duchess were placed, and was warmly greeted by the latter as an old and valued friend.

She made a place for him by her side; and leaning down from time to time by the good old lady's chair, he took the opportunity of each interval between the appearance of the new guests to address to her some little kindly and graceful observation, calling back her memory to old times, when she had fondled his boyhood, and by mingling, perhaps, a little of the melancholy that adheres to the past with more cheerful subjects, rendered them thereby not the less pleasant.

The duchess was well pleased with his attention, and for some time seemed inclined to enjoy it alone; but at length she said, "I must not keep you here, count, all night, or I shall have the duke jealous at sixty, which would never do. You must go and say sweet things, as in duty bound, to younger dames than I am. See, there is Mademoiselle de Fronsac, as pretty a creature as ever was seen, and our Clémence. You know Clémence, do you not? but look—Mademoiselle de Fronsac, as if to give you a fair opportunity, has dropped her bracelet."

The count advanced to pick up the bracelet for the young lady to whom his attention had been called; but his purpose was anticipated by a gentleman who stood near; and, at the same moment, the chevalier, seeing his friend detached from the side of the duchess, crossed the saloon towards him and took him by the arm. "Come, Albert," he said, "come! this is affectation. You must come and undergo the ordeal of those bright eyes. She has been speaking of you, and with deep interest, I assure you."

The count smiled. "To mortify some culprit lover!" he said, "or give a pang to some young foolish heart. Was it you, Louis?" he asked, in the same tone; "was it you she sought to tease, by speaking with interest of another?"

"You are wrong, Albert," said the chevalier, in a low voice, leading him gradually towards the spot, "you are wrong; I do not seek Clémence de Marly. My reso-

lution has long been taken. I shall never marry, nor would any consideration upon earth lead her to marry me. I know that full well; but, while I say so, I tell you too that you do her injustice. You must not judge of her at once."

They were now within a few steps of the spot where Clémence stood; and the count, who had been looking down while he advanced, listening to the low words of the chevalier, now raised his eyes as the other took a step forward to introduce him. To his surprise, he saw the colour varying in the cheek of the lovely being before whom he stood, and a slight degree of flutter in her manner and appearance, which Albert de Morseuil could only account for by supposing that the scene in which they had last met, the robbers, and the wood, and the plunder of the carriage, had risen up before her eyes, and produced the agitation he saw in one who was apparently so self-possessed in her usual demeanour. There, upon her finger, too, he saw the identical ring that he had saved for her from the robbers; and as he was in no way vain, he attributed the heightened colour to all those remembrances. But while he recalled that evening, his feelings towards Clémence grew less severe; he felt there was a tie between them of some interest; he felt, too, that her demeanour then had been very different from that which it appeared to be now. Though scarcely ten words had been spoken in the wood, those words had been all indicative of deep feelings and strong affections; there had been the signs of the heart, the clinging memories of love, the pure sensations of an unworldly spirit; and when he now gazed upon her, surrounded by flatterers and lovers, heartless herself, and seeming to take no delight but in sporting with the hearts of others, the ancient story of the two separate spirits in the same form seemed realized before him, and he knew not how to reconcile the opposite traits that he observed.

All this passed through his mind in a moment. Rapid thought, that, winging its way along the high road of time, can cover years in a single instant, had glanced over all that we have said, even while the words of introduction were hanging upon the tongue of the Chevalier d'Evran. The count bowed low but gravely, met the full glance of those lustrous eyes without the slightest change of countenance, and was about to add

some commonplace and formal compliment; but Clémence de Marly spoke first.

"I sent the chevalier to you, Monsieur de Morseiul," she said, with the same musical voice which he remembered so well, "because you seemed not to recognise me; and I wished to thank you for a service that you rendered long ago to a wild girl, who might probably have been killed by a fiery horse that she was riding, had you not stopped it, and given her back the rein which she had lost. Perhaps you have forgotten it, for I hear that great acts are so common to the Count de Morseiul that he is likely not to recollect what was to him a trifling event. To me, however, the service was important, and I have not forgotten either it or the person who rendered it."

The eye of the Chevalier d'Evran was upon the Count de Morseiul while the lady spoke, and there was a sparkling brightness in it which his friend scarcely understood. At the same time, however, it was scarcely possible for human nature to hear such words from such lips totally unmoved.

"Your pardon, madam," replied the count; "I have never forgotten the adventure either; but I did not expect that you would have remembered so trifling a service. I recollected you the moment that I saw you; but did not, of course, venture to claim to be recognised on the merit of so insignificant an act."

"I can answer for his not having forgotten it," said the Chevalier d'Evran, "for it is not more than five or six days ago, Mademoiselle de Marly, that he told me the whole circumstances; and, if I would, I could mention—"

The colour rose slightly in the Count de Morseiul's cheek as the Chevalier d'Evran gazed upon him with a malicious smile; but the latter, however, paused in his career, only adding, "If I would, I could mention all this grave count's comments upon that event; but I suppose I must not."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Clémence, "I insist upon your telling us. You are our bondsman and slave. As you have vowed worship and true service, I command you, Monsieur le Chevalier, to tell the whole without reserve; to give us the secrets of the enemy's camp."

"I hope, madam," said the count, willing to turn the

conversation, and yet knowing very well that he might obviate his own purpose if he showed any anxiety to do so, "I hope, madam, that you do not class me among the enemy; if you do, I can assure you you are very much mistaken."

"That is what I wish to know, count," replied the lady, smiling; "it is for that very purpose of knowing whether you are of the friends or the enemies, that I put the chevalier here upon his honour as to your comments."

"I suppose, madam," said the elder gentleman to whom she had been speaking during the former part of the evening, and who did not seem at all well pleased with the interruption occasioned by the count's presence, "I suppose, madam, if you put the chevalier upon his honour, he will be obliged to keep secret that which was intrusted to him in confidence."

Clémence turned and gazed at him for a moment in silence, and then said, "You are right, Monsieur le Duc de Melcourt, though I did not think to hear you take part against me. I will find means to punish you, and to show you my power and authority in a way that perhaps you do not know. Monsieur le Chevalier, we shall excuse you for your contumacy, having the means of arriving at information by a higher power. Monsieur de Morseiul," she continued, raising her head with a look of queenly authority, "we command you to give us the information yourself; but that the ears of these worthy cavaliers and gentlemen who stand around may not be gratified by the intelligence, we will permit you to lead us to the dance which we see they are preparing for in the other room."

She extended her hand towards him. He could not, of course, refuse to take it; and, after giving one glance of gay and haughty irony at the group she left behind, Clémence de Marly moved forward towards the other room with Albert of Morseiul. With the same air of proud consciousness she passed through the whole of the first saloon; but the moment that she entered the second, which was comparatively vacant, as the dancers were gathering in the third, her manner entirely altered. The count felt her hand rest somewhat languidly in his; her carriage lost a great degree of its stately dignity; the look of coquettish pride passed away; and she said, "Monsieur de Morseiul, I need

not tell you that my object in exercising, in this instance, that right of doing anything that I like unquestioned which I have found it convenient to assume, is not to ask you any foolish question of what you may have said or thought concerning a person but little worthy of your thoughts at all. Perhaps, indeed, you may have already guessed my object in thus forcing you, as it were, to dance with me against your will; but that does not render it the less necessary for me to take the first, perhaps the only opportunity I may have of thanking you deeply, sincerely, and truly, for the great service, and the kind, the manly, the chivalrous manner in which it was performed, that you rendered me on the night of Monday last. I have my own particular reasons—and, perhaps, may have reasons also for many other things that appear strange—for not wishing that adventure to be mentioned anywhere. Although I had with me two servants attached to the carriage, and also my old and faithful attendant, whom you saw, there was no chance of my secret being betrayed by any one but you. I was not sure that I had made my wishes plain when I left you, and was anxious about to-night; but I saw in a moment, from your whole demeanour in entering the room, that I was quite safe, and I may add my thanks for that to my thanks for the service itself."

"The service, lady, required no thanks," replied the count. "I do believe there is not a gentleman in France that would not have done the same for any woman upon earth."

Clémence shook her head with a grave, even a melancholy look, replying, "You estimate them too highly, count. We women have better opportunities of judging them; and I know that there are not three gentlemen in France, and perhaps six in Europe, who would do anything for any woman without some selfish, if not some base motive, unless his own gratification were consulted rather than her comfort."

"Nay, nay, nay; you are bitter, indeed," said the count. "On my word, I believe there is not one French gentleman who would not, as I have said, have done the same for any woman; and, certainly, when it was done for you, any little merit that it might have had otherwise was quite lost."

"Hush, hush," said Clémence, with a blush and a

somewhat reproachful smile ; "hush, hush, Monsieur de Morseuil ; you forget that I am accustomed to hear such sweet speeches from morning till night, and know their right value. If you would prove to me that you really esteem me, do not take your tone from those empty coxcombs that flutter through such scenes as these. Be to me, as far as we are brought into communication together, the Count de Morseuil that I have heard you are to others, frank, straightforward, sincere."

"Indeed I will," replied the count, feeling the full influence of all his fanciful dreams in the past reviving in the present ; "but will you never be offended ?"

"There is little chance," she replied, as they moved on, "that we should ever see enough of each other for me to be offended. You, I hear, avoid the court as far as possible. I am doomed to spend the greater part of my life there ; and I fear there is very little chance of the duke, my guardian, going to the quiet shades of Ruffigny, where first I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Were you then at Ruffigny when I first saw you ?" demanded the count, with some surprise.

"Yes," she answered ; "but I was staying there with some of my own relations, who were on a visit to the duke. Do you remember—I dare say you do not—do you remember meeting me some days after with a party on horseback ?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have it all before my eyes even now."

"And the lady who was upon my left hand ?" she said.

"Quite well," replied the count ; "was that your mother ?"

"Alas, no," replied Clémence, "that was my step-mother ; my mother died three years before. But, to return to what we were saying, I do not pretend to be less vain than other women, and, therefore, can scarcely answer for it, that, if you were to tell me harsh truths, I might not be offended ; but I will tell you what, Monsieur de Morseuil, I would try—I would try as steadily as possible not to be offended ; and, even if I were, I know my own mind sufficiently to say I would conquer it before the sun went down twice."

"That is all that I could desire," replied the count ; "and if you promise me to do so, I will always be sincere and straightforward with you."

"What an opportunity that promise gives," replied the lady, "of asking you to be sincere at once, and tell me what were the comments of which the chevalier spoke. Would that be ungenerous, Monsieur de Morseiul?"

"I think it would," replied the count; "but I will pledge myself to one thing, that, if you keep your promise towards me for one month, and take no offence at anything I may say, I will tell you myself what those comments were, without the slightest concealment whatsoever."

The eyes of Clémence de Marly sparkled as she answered, "You shall see;" but they had lingered so long that the dance was on the eve of commencing, and they were forced to hurry on into the other room. There the count found the eyes of the Prince de Marsillac wherever he turned; and there was a peculiar expression on his countenance—not precisely a smile, but yet approaching to it—with a slight touch of sarcastic bitterness on the lip, which was annoying. Could the count have heard, however, the conversation that was going on among two or three of the group which he and Clémence had quitted shortly before, he might have felt still more annoyed. There were three persons who took but a small part in that conversation, the chevalier, the young Marquis de Hericourt, and the Duc de Melcourt. It was one of those that stood behind who first spoke.

"How long will she be?" he demanded.

"In doing what?" said another.

"In fixing the fetters," replied the first; "in making him one of the train."

"Not two whole days," said the second.

"Not two whole hours, I say," added a third; "look at them now, how they stand in the middle chamber: depend upon it, when the count comes back, we shall all have to make him our bow, and welcome him as one of us."

There was a little shrivelled old man who sat behind, and had, as yet, said nothing.

"He will never be one of you, gentlemen," he now said, joining in; "he will never be one of you, for he sets out with a great advantage over you."

"What is that?" demanded two or three voices at once.

"Why," replied the old man, "he is the first man under sixty I ever heard her even civil to in all my life: There is Monsieur le Duc there; you know he's out of the question, because he's past the age."

The Duc de Melcourt looked a little mortified, and said, "Sir, you are mistaken; and, at all events, she never said anything civil to you, though you are so much past the age."

"I never asked her," replied the other.

"But there is the Chevalier d'Evran," replied one of the younger men; "she has said three or four civil things to him this very night: I heard her."

"As much bitter as sweet in them," replied the old man; "but, at all events, she does not love him."

"She loves me more than you know," said the chevalier, quietly; and, turning on his heel, he went to join a gay party on the opposite side of the room, and per-versely paid devoted attention to a fair lady whom he cared nothing about, and to whom the morals of any other court would have required him to pay no other attentions but those of ordinary civility.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GROWTH OF LOVE.

THE entertainment was kept up late; many of the guests scarcely departed before daylight; those who were invited to remain the night at the governor's house retired when they thought fit; and every one acknowledged that this was the most splendid and the most agreeable fête that had been given in Poitiers for many years. What were the feelings, however, of the Count de Morseiul, as, at an hour certainly not later than one in the morning, he sought his own apartments? We must not afford those feelings much space; and we will only record what he saw before he left the hall, leaving the mind of the reader to supply the rest.

On leading back Clémence de Marly to her seat, he had entered into conversation for a moment with some

persons whom he knew ; and, when he turned towards her again, he saw not only that she was surrounded by almost all those who had been about her before, but that a number of young chevaliers freshly arrived had swelled her train, and that her demeanour was precisely the same as that which had, at his first entrance, removed her from the high place in which his imagination had enthroned her. Every flattery seemed to be received as merely her due ; every attention but as a tribute that she had a right to command. On some of her slaves she smiled more graciously than on others, but certainly was not without giving that encouragement to many which may be afforded by saucy harshness as much as by attention and condescension. She did not, indeed, dance frequently ;* that was a favour reserved for few ; but the whole of the rest of her conduct displeased Albert of Morseiul ; and he was grieved, very much grieved, to feel that it had power to give him pain.

Under these circumstances, then, he resolved to witness it no more, and retired to his own apartments, determined, as far as possible, to conquer his own feelings while they were yet to be conquered, and to rule his heart so long as it was his own to rule.

It was late on the following morning before any of the guests assembled at the breakfast table ; but, when the whole had met, the party was so large that but little pleasant conversation could take place with any one. The Duke de Rouvré paid the greatest attention to the count, and displayed a marked anxiety to distinguish and to please him. Clémence de Marly was entirely surrounded by her little train ; and her pleasure in the homage she received seemed evident to Albert of Morseiul. The Chevalier d'Evran was somewhat thoughtful and grave, and more than once turned his eyes quickly from the face of Clémence to that of his friend. In the hours that had lately passed, however, Albert of Morseiul had practised the lesson of commanding himself, which he had learned long before, and he was now perfect at the task. He took no notice whatsoever of the fair girl's demeanour towards others ; and though, as usual, calm and grave, he bore his part in the con-

* On many occasions, each lady remained with her first partner during the whole of a ball-night ; but this was not invariable.

versation with earnestness and attention ; and it so happened that on more than one occasion something was said which called up the deep poetical fire of his nature, and led him briefly to pour forth in eloquent words the fine and high-toned feelings of his heart.

All who were present knew his high character, and all were struck with his words and with his manner ; so that once or twice, even when speaking casually on things of no very great importance, he was annoyed at finding a sudden deep silence spread round the table, and every one listening to what he said. If anything could have repaid him for the annoyance, it might have been to see the lustrous eyes of Clémence de Marly fixed intent upon his countenance till they met his, and then dropped with a slight heightening of the colour, or turned sparkling to those round her, while her lips gave utterance to some gay jest, intended to cover the fit of eager attention in which she had been detected.

Alas, however, it must be owned, that to find those eyes so gazing upon him was no compensation, but rather was painful to Albert of Morseuil ; for it only served to encourage feelings which he was determined to conquer. He would fain have had it otherwise ; he would have felt nothing but calm indifference towards Clémence de Marly ; and yet he knew, from what he had experienced on the preceding night, that he did not feel towards her entirely as he did towards other women. He thought, however, that by dedicating himself altogether to the great and important subject which had filled his thoughts when he came to Poitiers, by giving up all his thoughts to that, and by making his stay as brief as possible, he should be enabled to avoid those things, both in the society of Clémence herself and in his own inmost thoughts, which might become dangerous to his peace.

During the course of breakfast he revolved these things in his mind, and, before it was over, his thoughts were more strongly directed than ever to the affairs of the Protestants, by the appearance of the Abbés de St. Helie and Pelisson. He determined then to endeavour, as far as possible, in the very first instance, to discover from them what was the nature of the measures about to be pursued by the court of France towards the Huguenots. In the next place he purposed to inquire explicitly of the Duc de Rouvré what course of conduct

he intended to follow towards the Protestants of the province ; and, having ascertained these facts, to consult with all the wisest and the best of the Huguenot leaders who might happen to be at Poitiers, to determine with them the line of action to be followed, according to circumstances, and then to return at once to Morseiul.

He took an opportunity, then, as soon as breakfast was over, of conversing with Pelisson and St. Helie, while the Duke and Duchess of Rouvré were busy in receiving the adieus of some of their departing guests. With the frank sincerity of his native character, he demanded, straightforwardly, of the two ecclesiastics, what was the course of conduct that their commission directed them to pursue ; and Pelisson had half replied, saying that they had better open their commission at once before the Duke de Rouvré, and see the contents, when his more cunning and politic friend interrupted him, saying he had express orders not to open the packet till the meeting of the states, which was to take place in about eight days. This announcement, differing in some degree from the account which he had given before, excited not unjustly the count's suspicion ; and, knowing that he should have a more candid reply from the duke himself, he determined, in the next instance, to apply to him.

He did so not long after, and the duke retired with him into his library.

"My dear Morseiul," he said, grasping the young count's hand, "you know that I myself am an advocate for the utmost toleration ; that I am so far from entertaining any ill will towards my brethren who differ with me in some respects, that more than one of my relations have married Huguenots. This is very well known at the court also. The king is fully aware of it, and I cannot but hope that my late appointment as governor of this province is a sign that, notwithstanding all the rumours lately afloat, his majesty intends to deal kindly and well with all denominations of his subjects. I must not conceal from you, however, that there are rumours in Paris of a very different kind ; that there are not people wanting who declare that the king and his council are determined no longer to have any more than one religion in France, and that the most vigorous means are to be employed to carry this resolution into effect. Nor

shall I attempt to deny to you that the coming of Pellisson and St. Helie here seems to me a very ominous and unpleasant occurrence. The presence of the first I should care little about, as he is frank, and, I believe, sincere, wishes well, and would always act kindly; but the other is a shrewd knave, a bigot, I believe, more by policy than by any great devotion for our holy church, malevolent, selfish, and cunning. They bear a commission, which, it seems, is not to be opened till the meeting of the states. This looks like a purpose of controlling me in my own government, of putting a power over me whereof I am to stand in awe. Now, should I find this the case, I shall undoubtedly beseech his majesty to permit me to retire from public life."

"For Heaven's sake do not do so just at present," said the Count de Morseiul. "We have need, my dear friend, of every moderate and enlightened man like yourself to keep the country quiet at a moment when affairs seem verging towards a terrible convulsion. You must remember, and I hope the king will remember, that the Protestants are a great and important body in France; that there are two or three millions of us in this country; that we demand nothing but the calm and quiet exercise of our religious opinions; but that, at the same time, there are many resolute and determined men among us, and many eager and fiery spirits, who may be urged into acts of resistance if they be oppressed. All wise and sensible Huguenots will endeavour, as far as may be, to seek peace and tranquillity; but suppose that resistance be once begun, in consequence of an attempt to debar us of the free exercise of the rights secured to us by the edict of Nantes, can the king, or anybody else, expect even his most loyal and best-intentioned Protestant subjects to aid in keeping down and oppressing their brethren?"

"Not in oppressing, not in oppressing, my dear count," said the duke; "we must not attribute to our beloved sovereign even the thought of oppressing his subjects."

"Nothing but oppression could drive any of us to resistance," replied the count; "and it is not from the king at all that we anticipate oppression, but from those that surround him. Need I point to Louvois, to whom the king, by his own acknowledgment, yields his own better judgment?"

The duke was silent, and his young friend proceeded;

"If we have not to fear oppression, my lord, there is nothing to be feared throughout the land; but if we have, I would fain know what shape that oppression is likely to take, both as a sincere member of what we call the reformed church, and as a loyal and devoted subject of the king. I would fain know, in order that, in my own neighbourhood and among my own people, I may do all in my power to maintain peace and tranquillity, which I cannot at all answer for if such proclamations be suddenly made among the people when they are unprepared as were made five days ago in my town of Morseiul, nearly creating a serious disturbance therein. The appearance of the military, also, did infinite harm, and the renewal of such scenes might quickly irritate a small body of the people into revolt; that small body would be joined by greater numbers, and the flame of civil war would spread throughout the country."

"The proclamation," replied the duke, "was the king's, and, of course, it was necessary to make it instantly. With regard to the military, the intendant of the province demanded that a force should be sent to ensure that the proclamation was made peacefully; so, having no one else in whom I could at all trust, I sent young Hericourt, with as small a force as possible, as I could not, of course, refuse the application."

"Of the intendant of the province, my dear duke," replied the count, "I shall say nothing, except that he is as opposite as possible in mind, in character, and manners to the Duc de Rouvré. A man of low origin, chosen from the *maîtres des requêtes*, as all these intendants are, cannot be supposed to view such questions in a grand and fine point of view. Individual instances certainly may sometimes occur, but unfortunately they have not occurred in Poitiers. Our only safety is in the Duc de Rouvré; but I am most anxious, if possible, to act in concert with him in keeping tranquillity throughout the province."

"I know you are, my dear young friend, I know you are," replied the duke; "wait, however, for a few days. I expect several other gentlemen in Poitiers of your persuasion in religious matters. I will see and confer with you all as to what may be done, in the best spirit towards you, believe me. I have sent, or am sending, letters to every eminent man of the so-called reformed religion throughout this district, begging him to give me

the aid of his advice. When we have others here, we can take counsel together, and act accordingly."

The young count, of course, submitted, whatever were the private reasons which induced him to wish to quit Poitiers as soon as possible. He felt that a long sojourn there might be dangerous to him; he saw that the feelings of his heart might trample under foot the resolutions of his judgment. But, obliged as he was to remain, he now took the wisest course that circumstances permitted him to pursue. He saw Clémence de Marly as little as possible; and that portion of time which courtesy compelled him to give up to her was only yielded to her society upon those public occasions when he fancied that her demeanour to others was likely to counteract the effect of her fascinations upon himself. On these occasions he always appeared attentive, courteous, and desirous to please her. Perhaps, at times, even, there shone through his demeanour those indications of deeper feelings, and of a passion which might have become strong and overpowering, which were not likely to escape a woman's eye. But his general conduct was by no means that of a lover. He was never one of the train. He came and went, and spoke for a few moments in his usual calm and equable manner, but nothing more; and Clémence de Marly, it must be confessed, was somewhat piqued.

It was not that she sought to display the Count de Morseuil to the world as one of the idle train of adorers that followed her, for she despised them, and esteemed him too much to wish him among them; but it was that she thought her beauty, and her graces, and her mind; ay! and the feeling and noble heart which she knew to exist in her own bosom—forgetting that she took pains to conceal it—might all have had a greater effect upon the count than they had apparently produced.

She thought that she merited more than he seemed to be inclined to give; and there was something, also, in the little mysterious link of connexion between them which had, in some degree, excited her imagination, and taught her to believe that the count would take a deeper interest in her than he appeared to do. There was a little disappointment, a little surprise, a good deal of mortification. Was there anything more? We shall see! at present we have to deal with her conduct more than with her feelings, and that conduct, perhaps, was

not such as was best calculated to win the count's regard. It is true, she paid less attention to the train that followed her; she treated the generality of them with almost undisguised contempt. It seemed as if her haughtiness towards them, in general, increased; but, then, she was far more with the Chevalier d'Evran. She was seen walking in the gardens with him, with a single servant a step behind, and twice the Count de Morseiul entered the saloon, and found her sitting alone with him in eager conversation.

He felt more and more each day that it was time for him to quit the city of Poitiers, but still he was detained there by circumstances that he could not alter; and on the fifth day after his arrival, having passed a somewhat sleepless night, and feeling his brow hot and aching, he went down into the wide gardens of the house to enjoy the fresh morning air in comfort. It was an hour when those gardens seldom possessed a tenant; but, at the turn of the first walk, he met Clémence de Marly alone. She seemed to be returning from the farther part of the grounds, and had her eyes bent upon the earth, with a thoughtful, nay, with even a melancholy look. If they had not been so near when he saw her, he might, perhaps, have turned to avoid a meeting which he feared; but she was within a few steps, and raised her eyes instantly as she heard the sound of approaching feet. The colour came into her cheek as she saw him, but only slightly, and she acknowledged his salutation by a graceful inclination of the head.

"You are an early riser, Mademoiselle de Marly," said the count, as she paused to speak with him.

"I have always been so," she answered. "I love the soft breath of the morning air."

"It is one of the great secrets of health and beauty," rejoined the count. But she shook her head with a smile, saying,

"Such are not my objects in early rising, Monsieur de Morseiul. Health I scarcely value as it deserves, as I never knew the want of it; and beauty I value not at all. It is true! whatever you may think."

"Still, beauty has its value," replied the count. "It is a grand and noble gift of God; but I acknowledge it ought to be the mint mark of the gold."

"It is one of the most dangerous gifts of Heaven," replied Clémence, vehemently. "It is often one of the

most burdensome! It is dangerous to ourselves, to our own hearts, to our own eternal happiness. It is burdensome in all its consequences. Too much beauty to a woman is like overgrown wealth to a man: with this sad difference, that he can always do good with his possession, and she can do none with hers. And now Monsieur de Morseiul thinks me a hypocrite; and, though he promised ever to be straightforward with me, he will not say so."

"Nay, indeed," replied the count, "I am far from thinking that there is aught of hypocrisy in what you say, lady. I may think such feelings and thoughts evanescent with you, but I believe you feel them at the time."

Clémence shook her head with a melancholy, almost a reproachful look. "They are not evanescent," she said, earnestly. "They are constant, steadfast; have been for years." Even while she spoke she turned to leave him; and he thought, as she quickly averted her head, that there was something like a tear in her bright eye.

He could not resist; and he followed her rapidly, saying, "I hope I have not offended."

"Oh no!" she answered, turning to him, and letting him see without disguise that the tear was really there; "oh no! Monsieur de Morseiul! There was nothing said that could offend me. Do you not know that, like a child putting its hand upon an instrument of music without knowing he will produce any sound, a mere casual word will often be spoken unconsciously, which, by some unseen mechanism in the breast of another, will awaken emotions which we never intended to call up? Our little conversation roused the thoughts of many years in a moment; but there was nothing said that could in the least offend. You know we vain women, count," she added, in a lighter mood, "are only offended with our lovers. It is on them that we pour forth our caprices. So, for Heaven's sake, take care how you become my lover, for then I should certainly be offended with you every five minutes."

"Would it be so terrible to you, then, to see me your lover?" demanded the count, in the same tone.

"To be sure," she answered, half playfully, half seriously; "it would be a sad exchange, would it not? to give a friend for a slave. Besides, I doubt not that

you have loved a thousand times before. But tell me, count, do you think any one can love more than once?"

"From my own experience I cannot speak," replied the count, "for I am a very stony-hearted person; but I should think that a man might."

"And woman not!" she interrupted, eagerly. "Poor women! You hem us in on all sides! But, after all, perhaps, you are right," she added, after a moment's pause. "There is, there must be a difference between the love of man and the love of woman. Hers is the first fresh brightness of the heart, which never can be known again; hers is the flower which, once broken off, is succeeded by no other; hers is the intense, the deep, the all-engrossing, which, when once come and gone, leaves the exhausted heart without the power of feeling such things again. With man it is different: love has not that sway over him that it has over a woman. It is not with him the only thing, the end, the object of his being. It takes possession of him but as a part, and, therefore, may be known more than once, perhaps. But, with woman, that fire once kindled must be the funeral pile of her own heart. As the ancients fabled, flowers may spring up from the ashes; but, as far as real love is concerned, after the first true affection the heart is with the dead."

She paused, and both were silent; for there was something in the words which she spoke which had a deeper effect upon Albert of Morseiul than he had imagined anything could have produced. He struggled against himself, however, and then replied, "You took me up too quickly, lady. I was not going to say that it is impossible for woman to love twice. I do not know, I cannot judge; but I think it very possible that the ancients, to whom you have just alluded, may have intended to figure love under the image of the phoenix; and I do fully believe that many a woman may have fancied herself in love a dozen times before she was so really."

"Fancy herself in love!" exclaimed Clémence, in a tone almost indignant. "Fancy herself in love, Monsieur de Morseiul! I should think it less difficult to love twice than to fancy one's self in love at all, if one were not really so. We may perhaps fancy qualities in a person who does not truly possess them, and thus,

adorned by our own imagination, may love him; but still it is not that we fancy we are in love, but are really in love with the creature of our fancy. However, I will talk about it no more. It is a thing that does not do to think of. I wonder if ever there was a man that was really worth loving."

The count replied, but he could not get her to pursue the subject any farther; she studiously rambled away to other things; and, after speaking of some matters of minor import, darted back at once to the point at which the conversation had begun, as if the rest had been but a temporary dream, interpolated, as it were, between matters of more serious moment. The count had been endeavouring to bring her back to the subject of the heart's feelings; for though he felt that it was a dangerous one—a most dangerous one—one that might well lead to words that could never be recalled, yet he longed to gain some insight into that heart which he could not but think was filled with finer things than she suffered to appear. She would not listen, however, nor be led, and replied as if she had not in the slightest degree attended to what he had been saying:

"No, Monsieur de Morseiul, no, it is neither for health's sake nor for beauty's that I rise early and seek the morning air. I will tell you why it is. In those early and solitary hours, and those hours alone, I can have some communion with my own heart; I can converse with the being within myself; I can hold conference, too, with what I never meet alone at other hours—nature, and nature's God. The leaves of the green trees have tongues, drowned in the idle gabble of a foolish multitude, but heard in the calm quiet of the early morning. The fields, the brooks, the birds, the insects, all have their language if we will listen to it; but what are fields, and brooks, and birds, and trees, and the soft air, when I am surrounded by a tribe of things as empty as the sounding brass or tinkling cymbal? Can I think of anything more dignified than a paduasoe when one baby man is whispering softly in my ear, 'The violet, mademoiselle, suits better with your complexion than with any other the earth ever produced, which shows that complexion's exceeding brightness;' and another tells me that the blackness of my hair would make a raven blush, or that my eyes are fit to people the heaven with stars! But it is time that I should go to my

task," she continued; "so adieu, Monsieur de Morseuil. If you walk on straight to the ramparts, you will find the view beautiful and the air fresh."

Thus saying, she turned and left him, and the hint not to follow was too plain to be misunderstood. He walked on, then, towards the ramparts, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon the ground. He did not soliloquize, for his nature was not one of those which frequently give way to such weaknesses. It was his thoughts that spoke, and spoke plainly, though silently.

"She is, indeed, lovely," he thought, "and she is, indeed, enchanting. If she would but give her heart way, she is all that I pictured to myself, all that I dreamed of, though with a sad mixture of faults from which her original nature was free. But, alas! it is evident that she either does love or has loved another, and she herself confesses that she cannot love twice. Perhaps she has spoken thus plainly as a warning, and, if so, how much ought I to thank her for her frankness? Besides, she is of another creed. I must dream upon this subject no more. Yet who can be the man who has won that young heart, and then, perhaps, thought it not worth the wearing? Surely, surely it cannot be D'Evrant, and yet she evidently likes his society better than that of any one. She seeks him rather than otherwise. How can I tell what may have passed, what may be passing between them even now? Yet she is evidently not at ease at heart, and he too told me but the other day that it was his determination never to marry. He—made for loving and being loved!—he never marry! It must be so; some quarrel has taken place between them, some breach which they think irremediable. How often is it, when such things are the case, that lovers will fancy that they are cool, and calm, and determined, and can live like friends and acquaintances, forgetting the warmer feelings that have once existed between them! Yes, it must be so," he continued, as he pondered over all the different circumstances: "it must be so, and they will soon be reconciled. I will crush these foolish feelings in my heart; I will banish all weak remembrances; and, to do so effectually, I will quit this place as soon as possible, leaving Louis here if he chooses to stay."

Thus musing, with a sad heart and bitterer feelings than he would even admit to himself, Albert de Morseuil

walked on in the direction which Clémence had pointed out; and, passing through various long alleys planted in the taste of that day, arrived at a spot where some steps led up to the ramparts of the town, which commanded a beautiful view over the gently undulating country round Poitiers, with more than one little river meandering through the fields around. Leaning his arms on the low breastwork, he paused and gazed over a scene on which, at any other time, he might have looked with feelings of deep interest, and noted every little mound and tree, marking, as he was wont, each light and shadow, and following each turn of the Clain or Boivre. Now, however, there was nothing but a vague vision of green and sunny things before his eyes, while the sight of the spirit was fixed intensely upon the deeper and darker things of his own heart.

Alas! alas! it must be said, he felt that he loved Clémence de Marly. Notwithstanding all he had seen, notwithstanding all he had condemned, notwithstanding the fear that she could not make him happy even if he could obtain her, the belief that it would be impossible to win her, and the conviction that she loved another—alas! he felt, and felt bitterly, that at length, indeed, he loved, and loved with the whole energy of his nature. He reproached himself with weakness; he accused himself of the follies that he had so often condemned in others. Was it her mere beauty that he loved? he asked himself. Was it the mere perfection of form and colour that, in a few short years, would fleet with fleeting seasons, and give place to irremediable decay? Was he, who had believed that loveliness could have no effect on him, was he caught by the painted glittering of a mere beautiful statue? No; he felt there was something more. He felt that she had given him sufficient insight into her original nature to show him that, though spoiled by after circumstances, she had been made by the hand of God that which he had always believed he could love, that bright being where the beautiful form, and the beautiful heart, and the beautiful mind were all attuned together in one grand and comprehensive harmony of nature. He felt that such was the case, and his sensations were only the bitterer that it should be so.

He had thus paused and meditated some little time, full of his own thoughts and nothing else, when a hand

was suddenly laid upon his shoulder, and, turning round, he saw his friend the chevalier.

"Why, Albert," he said, "in what melancholy guise are you here meditating? I met Clémence upon the stairs just now, and she told me that I should find you here, tasting the morning air upon the ramparts. I expected to see you with your eye roving enchanted over this fine scene, looking, as usual, half way between a mad poet and a mad painter; and lo! instead of that, here you are planted upon the rampart like a dragoon officer in garrison in a dull Dutch town, with your heel beating melancholy time on the pavement, and your eyes profoundly cast into the town ditch. In the name of Heaven, why did you not make Clémence come on to enliven you?"

The count smiled with a somewhat bitter smile. "It would have hardly been necessary, and hardly right to try," he replied; "but you miscalculate my power, D'Evran. The lady left me with an intelligible hint, not only that she was not about to follow me, but that I was not to follow her."

"What, saucy with you, too!" cried the chevalier, laughing. "I did not think that she would have had determination enough for that."

"Nay, nay, you are mistaken, Louis," replied the count; "not in the least saucy, as you term it, but quite mistress of herself, of course, to do as she pleased."

"And yet, Albert," said the chevalier, "and yet I do believe that there is not a man in France with whom she would so willingly have walked through these gardens as with yourself. Nay, do not be foolish or blind, Albert. I heard her saying to Marsillac but yesterday, when he called to take his leave, that she had seen at Poitiers more than she had ever seen in her life before, a courtier who was not a fool, a soldier who was not a libertine, and a man of near thirty who had some good feelings left."

The count gazed steadfastly into the chevalier's face for a moment, as if he would have read into his very soul, and then replied, "Come, Louis, let us go back. If she meant me, she was pleased to be complimentary, and had probably quarrelled with her real lover, and knew that he was in hearing."

The chevalier gave himself a turn round upon his heel without reply, sang a bar or two of a gay air at

VOL. I.—M

that time fashionable in Paris, and then walked back to the governor's house with the count, who, from everything he had seen and heard, but the more firmly determined to hasten his steps from Poitiers as fast as possible.

The hour of breakfast had not yet arrived when they entered the house, and the count turned to his own apartments, seeking to remain in solitude for a few minutes, not in order to indulge in thoughts and reflections which he felt to be unnerving, but to make a vigorous effort to recover all his composure, and pass the rest of the two or three days which he had to remain as if nothing had given any disturbance to the usual tranquil course of his feelings. In the anteroom, however, he found Maître Jerome, sitting watching the door like a cat before the hole of a mouse; and the moment he entered Jerome sprang up, saying,

"Oh, monseigneur, I have something to say to you which may not be amiss to hear quickly. I have discovered the exact nature of the commission of Monsieur de St. Helie, which you wanted to know."

The count beckoned him into the inner chamber, and demanded, looking at him sternly, "Truth or falsehood, Riquet? This is no joking matter!"

"Truth, upon my honour, sir," replied the man; "I would deceive you on no account whatsoever; and now, pray, sir, ask no questions, but let me tell my tale. It is truth, for once in my life, depend upon it. I can tell truth upon an occasion, sir, when it suits me."

"But how am I to be sure of the accuracy of the information if I ask you no questions, Riquet?" said the count.

"You may be quite sure of it, sir," replied the man, "though I must not tell you how I came at my tale. Suppose, I say, only suppose that I had heard Monsieur de St. Helie repeating it word for word to Monsieur Pelisson, and the Curé de Guadrieul had confirmed it. I say, suppose it were so, and be sure that my authority is quite as good."

"Well, well," said his master, "go on."

"Well, then, sir," continued the servant, "of course, as a good Catholic, I hope that you and all the other Huguenots of France may be thoroughly roasted in good time; but, nevertheless, as you happen to be my master in this world, I am in duty bound to tell you

what I heard. Monsieur de St. Helie, then, and Monsieur Pelisson are commanded to demand of the states of the province effectual measures to be taken for the purpose of bringing into the bosom of the church, without delay, all the Huguenots within their jurisdiction. In expressing this demand there are a great many soft words used, and much talk of gentleness and persuasion; but Huguenots' children are to be brought over by all means; they are to be received to renounce their errors at seven years old. No more Huguenots are to be permitted to keep schools. They are to be excluded from all public offices of any kind or character whatsoever. They are no longer to be allowed to call their religion *the reformed religion*—"

"Enough, enough," said the count, stopping him, "and more than enough. Is this information sure?"

"Most sure, sir," replied the man, with a solemnity that admitted no doubt of his sincerity, "and the commission ended with the words, that these means were to be taken in preparation for those ulterior steps which the king was determined to employ."

The count made no reply, but paced the room for two or three minutes in considerable agitation. "I wanted something to rouse me," he said, at length, "and I have it now, indeed! Quick, Riquet, call Claude, and Beyhours, and Martin; tell them to saddle their horses, for I want them to carry some notes. When you have done that, come hither yourself, and say not a word of this affair to any one."

When the man returned, he found three notes written and addressed to different Protestant noblemen in the neighbourhood of Poitiers, which his lord directed him to give to the servants named, to carry them to their several destinations; and then added, "Now, Riquet, I have a commission for you yourself; I will not give you a note, as that is useless. You would know the contents of it before you got to the end of your journey: of that I am well aware."

"Certainly, sir," replied the man, with his usual effrontery; "I always make a point of that, for then I can tell the purport on my arrival if I lose the note by the way."

"I know it," replied the count; "but I believe you, notwithstanding, to be faithful, and attached to me, and that you can be silent when it is necessary."

"As the grave, sir," replied the man.

"Well, then," continued his master, "you know the chateau of the Maille, at about two leagues' distance. Go thither; ask to speak to Monsieur de Corvoie; tell him that I will be with him to-morrow about midday; that I have matters of the deepest importance to communicate to him; and that I have asked three other gentlemen of our own persuasion to meet me at his house to-morrow. Say nothing more and nothing less."

"Sir, I will cut it on all sides exactly as you have commanded," replied the man, "and will bear you his message back immediately, if there should be any."

These arrangements being made, the count descended to the breakfast-table, where he found the chevalier seated by the side of Clémence de Marly. The count had resolved that, during his stay, he would notice the conduct of Clémence as little as possible; that he would endeavour to look upon her as a being that could never be his; but, nevertheless, he could not now help noticing that though she and the chevalier might not converse much together, there was from time to time a few words passed between them in a low voice, evidently referring to things apart from the general conversation that was going on. He steeled his heart, though with agony to himself; and pleading the necessity of visiting some friends in the neighbourhood, mounted his horse immediately after breakfast, and was absent from Poitiers the greater part of the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING AND THE CHASE.

ON the following morning, at breakfast, some sports and diversions were proposed; and the governor, who wished to afford amusement to all parties, and to keep them in especial good-humour till after the meeting of the states, proposed to set out almost immediately to force a stag in the neighbouring woods. There were several young noblemen present, swelling the train of la belle Clémence, but she had shown herself some-

what grave, and less lively than usual ; and, after the proposal had been made and agreed to by almost all, she remarked the silence of the Count de Morseiul, saying that she feared, from the profound silence that he kept, they were again to be deprived of the pleasure of Monsieur de Morseiul's society, as they had been on their ride of the day before. She spoke in rather a low voice, and, perhaps one might say, timidly, for her manner was very different from that which she usually assumed.

"I fear, fair lady," replied the count, who felt that, under any other circumstances, her speech would have been a sore temptation, "I fear that I have engaged myself to visit a friend in the neighbourhood at noon to-day."

"Oh, we will take no excuse," cried the Duc de Rouvré ; "indeed, count, you must send a messenger to tell your friend you cannot come. You, who are famed for your skill in forest sports, must positively be with us."

The count, however, remained firm, saying that he had appointed to meet his friend on business of importance to them both ; and the Duc de Rouvré was of course silent. The young De Hericourt, who had been absent for a day or two, and had only lately returned, gazed at Clémence with a sort of ironical smile as he saw upon her countenance a look of mortification which she could not or would not restrain ; but the count saw it too, and was struck with it ; for, though skilful by habit in reading the hearts of those with whom he was brought into contact, he could not perfectly satisfy himself with regard to the nature of that look and the feelings from which it sprung. He felt, too, that something more than a dry refusal was, perhaps, owing in mere courtesy to Clémence for the wish she had expressed for his society, and he added,

"I do assure you, Mademoiselle de Marly, that nothing could have been so great a temptation to me as the thought of accompanying you, and our gay friends here, to wake the woods with the sounds of horns and dogs ; and I grieve very much that this appointment should have been made so unfortunately."

"Indeed," she exclaimed, brightening up, "if such be your feelings, I will coax *ma reine*, as I always call our good duchess, to coax the governor, who never refuses anything to her, though he refuses plenty of things to

me, to delay the party for an hour. Then we shall be some time getting to the woodside, you know; some time making all our preparations; and you shall come and join us whenever you have done. We will make noise enough to let you know where we are."

Of course there was now no refusing; the count promised to come if the important business in which he was about to be engaged was over in time, and Clémence repaid him with a smile such as she but rarely gave to any. It was now wellnigh time for him to depart; and, after shutting himself up for a few minutes alone, in order to think over the circumstances about to be discussed, he set out with some servants, and rode rapidly to the chateau of the Maille. He found several horses in the courtyard, and judged rightly, from that sight, that the others had arrived before him. He found them all assembled in the large hall, and each greeted him gladly and kindly, looking with some eagerness for what he had to communicate. But the master of the chateau asked him to pause for a moment adding,

"I have a friend here who arrived last night, and whom you will all be glad to see. He will join us in a moment, as he is but writing a short despatch in another room."

"Who is he?" demanded the count; "is it Monsieur de l'Estang?"

"Oh no," replied the other. "He is a man of arms instead of a man of peace." But, almost as he spoke, the door opened, and the famous Maréchal de Schomberg entered the room.

"I am happy to see you all, gentleman," he said; "Monsieur de Morseiul, my good friend," he continued, shaking him warmly by the hand, "I am delighted to meet you. I have not seen you since we were fellow-soldiers together in very troublous times."

"I hope, marshal," replied the count, "that at the present we may be fellow-pacificators instead of fellow-soldiers. We are all Protestants, gentlemen, and as what I have lately learned affects us all, I thought it much the best plan, before I took any steps in consequence in my own neighbourhood, to consult with you, and see whether we could not draw up such a remonstrance and plain statement of our case to the king as to induce him to oppose the evil intentions of his ministers, and once more guaranty to us the full and entire enjoyment of

those rights in which he promised us security on his ascension to the throne, but which have been sadly encroached upon and curtailed within the last ten years."

"They have, indeed," said the Count de Champclair; "but I trust, Monsieur de Morseiul, you have nothing to tell us which may lead us to believe that greater encroachments still are intended."

Marshal Schomberg shook his head with a melancholy smile; but he did not interrupt the Count de Morseiul, who proceeded to relate what he knew of the mission of Pelisson and St. Helie, and the further information which he had gained in regard to their commission on the preceding day. The first burst of anger and indignation was greater than he expected, and nothing was talked of for a few minutes but active resistance to the powers of the crown, of reviving the days of the League or those of Louis XIII., and defending their rights and privileges to the last. Marshal Schomberg, however eminently distinguished for his attachment to his religion, maintained a profound silence during the whole of the first ebullitions; and at length Monsieur de Champclair remarked, "The marshal does not seem to think well of our purposes. What would he have us do, thus brought to bay?"

"My good friends," replied Schomberg, with his slight foreign accent, "I think only that you do not altogether consider how times have changed since the days of Louis XIII. Even then the reformed church of France was not successful in resisting the king, and now resistance, unless men were driven to it by despair, would be madness. Forced as I am to be much about the court, I have seen and known these matters in their progress more intimately than any of you, and can but believe that our sole hope will rest in showing the king the utmost submission, while, at the same time, we represent to him the grievances that we suffer."

"But does he not know those grievances already?" exclaimed one of the other gentlemen: "are they not his own act and deed?"

"They are, it is true," replied Schomberg, mildly, "but he does not know one half of the consequences which his own acts produce. Let me remind you that it is the people who surround the king that urge him to these acts, and it is consequently their greatest interest to prevent him from knowing the evil consequences

thereof. Not one half of the severities that are exercised in the provinces—indeed I may say, no severities at all—are exercised towards the Protestants in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris, Versailles, or Fontainebleau. They take especial care that the eyes of majesty and the ear of authority shall not be opened to the cries, groans, or sufferings of an injured people. Louis the Great is utterly ignorant that the Protestants have suffered, or are likely to suffer, under any of his acts. The king has been always, more or less, a bigot, and his mother was the same: Colbert is dead, who stood between us and our enemies. His son is a mere boy, unable, if not unwilling, to defend us. The fury, Louvois, and his old Jesuitical father, are, in fact, the only ministers that remain, and they have been our enemies from the beginning. But they have now stronger motives to persecute us. The king must be ruled by some passion; he is tired of the domination of Louvois, and that minister seeks now for some new hold upon his master. He supported his tottering power for many years by the influence of Madame de Montespan. Madame de Montespan has fallen, and a new reign has commenced under a woman who is the enemy of that great bad man; but she also is a bigot, and the minister clearly sees that, if he would remain a day in power, he must link Madame Scarron to himself in some general plan, which will identify their interests together. She sees, and he sees, that whatever be that plan, it must comprise something which affords occupation to the bigoted zeal of the king. The Jesuits see that too, and are very willing to furnish such occupation; but the king, who thinks himself a new St. George, is tired of persecuting Jansenism. That dragon is too small and too tenacious of life to afford a subject of interest to the king any longer; when he thinks it is quite dead, it revives again, and crawls feebly here and there, so that the saint is weary of killing a creature that seems immortal. Under these circumstances they have turned his eyes and thoughts towards the Protestants; and what have they proposed to him which might not seduce a glory-loving monarch like himself? They have promised him that he shall effect what none of his ancestors could ever accomplish, by completely triumphing over subjects who have shown that they can resist powerfully when oppressed. They have promised him

this glory as an absolute monarch. They have promised him almost apostolic glory in converting people whom he believes to be heretics. They have promised him the establishment of one, and one only religion in France; and they have promised him that, by so doing, he will inflict a bitter wound on those Protestant princes with whom he has been so long contending. Such are the motives by which they lead on the mind of Louis to severe acts against us; but there is yet one other motive, and to that I will particularly call your attention, as it ought, I think, greatly to affect our conduct. They have misrepresented the followers of the reformed religion in France as a turbulent, rebellious, obstinate race of men, who adhere to their own creed more out of opposition to the sovereign than from any real attachment to the religion of their forefathers. By long and artful reasonings they have persuaded the king that such is the case. He himself told me long ago, that individually there are a great many good men, and brave men, and loyal men among us; but that, as a body, we are the most stiff-necked and rebellious race he ever read of in history."

"Have we not been driven to rebellion?" demanded Monsieur de Champclair; "have we not been driven to resistance? Have we ever taken arms but in our own defence?"

"True," replied Schomberg, "quite true. But kings, unfortunately, see through the eyes of others. The causes of our resistance are hidden from him scrupulously. The resistance itself is urged upon him vehemently."

"Then it is absolutely necessary," said the Count de Morseiul, "that he should be made clearly and distinctly to know how much we have been aggrieved, how peaceably and loyally we are really disposed, and how little but the bitterest fruits can ever be reaped from the seeds that are now sowing."

"Precisely," replied Schomberg. "That is precisely what I should propose to do. Let us present a humble remonstrance to the king, making a true statement of our case. Let us make him aware of the evils that have accrued, of the evils that still must accrue from persecution, but in the language of the deepest loyalty and most submissive obedience. Let us open his eyes, in fact, to the real state of the case. This is our only

hope, for in resistance I fear there is none. The Protestant people are apathetic; they are not united; and they are not sufficiently numerous, even if they were united, to contend successfully with the forces of a great empire in a time of external peace."

"I do not know that," exclaimed Monsieur de Champclair. But he had the great majority of the persons who were then present against him, and, in a desultory conversation that followed, those who had most vehemently advocated resistance but a few minutes before; who had been all fire and fury, and talked loudly of sacrificing their lives a thousand times rather than sacrificing their religion, viewed the matter in a very different light now when the first eagerness was over. One declared that not an able-bodied man in forty would take the field in defence of his religion; another said that they had surely had warning enough at La Rochelle; another spoke, with a shudder, of Alaix. In short, Albert de Morseiul had an epitome in that small meeting of the doubts, fears, and hesitations; the apathy, the weakness, the renitency which would affect the great body of Protestants, if called upon suddenly to act together. He was forced, then, to content himself with pressing strongly upon the attention of all present the necessity of adopting instantly the suggestion of Marshal Schomberg, and of drawing up a representation to the king, to be signed as rapidly as possible by the chief Protestants throughout the kingdom, and transmitted to Schomberg, who was even then on his way towards Paris.

Vain discussions next ensued in regard to the tone of the remonstrance, and the terms that were to be employed; and those who were inclined to be more bold in words than in deeds proposed such expressions as would have entirely obviated the result sought to be obtained, giving the petition the character of a threatening and mutinous manifesto. Though this effect was self-evident, yet the terms had nearly been adopted by the majority of those present, and most likely would have been so, had not a fortunate suggestion struck the mind of Albert of Morseiul.

"My good friends," he said, "there is one thing which we have forgotten to consider. We are all of us soldiers and country gentlemen; and many of us have, perhaps, a certain tincture of belles lettres; but a petition

from the whole body of Protestants should be drawn up by some person eminent alike for learning, wisdom, and piety, whose very name may be a recommendation to that which he produces. What say you, then, to request Monsieur Claude de l'Estang to draw up the petition for our whole body? I intend to leave Poitiers to-morrow, and will communicate your desire to him. The paper shall be sent to you all as soon as it is drawn up, and nothing will remain but to place our hands to it and lay it before the king."

The proposal was received with joy by all; for even those who were pressing their own plans obstinately were at heart glad to be delivered from the responsibility; and this having been decided, the meeting broke up.

The Count de Morseiul lingered for a few minutes after the rest were gone to speak with Marshal Schomberg, who asked, "So you are not going to wait for the opening of the states?"

"I see no use of so doing," replied the count; "now that I know the measures which the king's commission dictates, I have nothing farther to detain me. But tell me, marshal, do you really believe that Louvois and his abettors will urge the king seriously to such steps?"

"To a thousand others," replied Schomberg; "to a thousand harsher, and a thousand more dangerous measures. I can tell you that it is already determined to prohibit for the future the marriages of Catholics and Protestants. That, indeed, were no great evil, and, I think, rather favourable to us than not; but it is only one out of many encroachments on the liberty of conscience, and, depend upon it, our sole hope is in opening the king's eyes to our real character as a body, and to the awful evils likely to ensue from oppressing us."

"But should we be unable so to do," demanded the count, "what remains for us then, my noble friend? Must we calmly submit to increasing persecution? must we renounce our faith? must we resist and die?"

"If by our death," replied Schomberg, firmly but sadly, "we could seal for those who come after us, even with our hearts' blood, a covenant of safety; if by our fall in defence of our religion we could cement, as with the blood of martyrs, the edifice of the reformed church; if there were even a hope that our destruction could purchase immunity to our brethren or our children, I should say that there is but one course before

us. But, alas ! my good young friend, do you not know, as well as I do, that resistance is hopeless in itself, and must be ruinous in its consequences ; that it must bring torture, persecution, misery, upon the women, the children, the helpless ; that it must crush out the last spark of toleration that is likely to be left ; and that the ultimate ruin of our church in France will but be hastened thereby ! No one deserving the title of man, gentleman, or Christian, will abandon his religion under persecution ; but there is another course to be taken, and it I shall take, if these acts against us be not stayed. I will quit the land ; I will make myself a home elsewhere. My faith shall be my country, as my sword has been my inheritance ! Would you take my advice, my dear count, you would follow my example, and, forming your determination beforehand, be prepared to act when necessary."

The count shook his head. "I thank you," he said, "I thank you, and I will give what you propose the fullest consideration ; but it is a consideration that cannot be taken at once, at least by such as feel as I do. Oh ! my good friend, remember how many ties I have to break asunder before I can act as you propose. There are all the sweet memories of youth, the clinging household dreams of infancy, the sunny home of my first days, when life's pilgrimage took its commencement in a garden of flowers. I must quit all these—every dear thing to which the remembrance of my brightest days is attached—and spend the autumn and the winter of my latter life in scenes where there is not even a memory of its spring. I must quit all these, Schomberg. I must quit more. I must quit the faithful people that have surrounded me from my boyhood ; who have grown up with me like brothers ; who have watched over me like fathers ; who have loved me with that hereditary love that none but lord and vassal can feel towards each other ; who would lay down their lives to serve me, and who look to me for direction, protection, and support. I must quit them, I must leave them a prey to those who would tear and destroy them. I must leave, too, the grave of my father, the tombs of my ancestors, round which the associations of the past have wreathed a chain of glorious memories that should bind me not to abandon them. I, too, should have my grave there, Schomberg ; I, too, should take my place among the many

who have served their country, and left a name without a stain. When I have sought the battle-field, have I not thought of them, and burned to accomplish deeds like theirs? When I have been tempted to do anything that is wrong, have I not thought upon their pure renown, and cast the temptation from me like a slimy worm? And should I leave those tombs now? Were it not better to do as they would have done, to hang out my banner from the walls against oppression, and, when the sword which they have transmitted to me can defend my right no longer, perish on the spot which is hallowed by the possession of their ashes?"

"No, my friend, no," replied Schomberg, "it were not better, for neither could you so best do honour to their names, neither would your death and sacrifice avail aught to the great cause of religious liberty. But there is more to be considered, Albert of Marseiul; you might not gain the fate you sought for. The perverse bullet and the unwilling steel often, too often, will not do their fatal mission upon him that courts them. How often do we see that the timid, the cowardly, or the man who has a thousand sweet inducements to seek long life, meets death in the first field he enters, while he who, in despair or rage, walks up to the flashing cannon's mouth escapes as by a miracle? Think, Marseiul, if such were to be your case, what would be the result: first to linger in imprisonment, next to see the exterminating sword of persecution busy among those that you had led on into revolt, to know that their hearths were made desolate, their children orphans, their patrimony given to others, their wives and daughters delivered to the brutal insolence of victorious soldiers; and then, knowing all this, to end your own days as a common criminal, stretched on a scaffold on the torturing wheel, amid the shouts and derisions of superstitious bigots, with the fraudulent voice of monkish hypocrisy pouring into your dying ear insults to your religion and to your God. Think of all this! and think also that, at that last moment, you would know that you yourself had brought it all to pass, without the chance of effecting one single benefit to yourself or others."

The count put his hand before his eyes, but made no reply; and then, wringing Marshal Schomberg's hand, he mounted his horse and rode slowly away.

VOL. I.—N

For a considerable distance he went on towards Poitiers at the same slow pace, filled with dark and gloomy thoughts, and with nothing but despair on every side. He felt that the words of Marshal Schomberg were true to their fullest extent, and a sort of presage of the coming events seemed to gather slowly upon his heart, like dark clouds upon the verge of the sky. His only hope reduced itself to the same narrow bounds which had long contained those of Schomberg; the result, namely, of the proposed petition to the king.

But there were one or two words which Schomberg had dropped accidentally, and which, it would seem, from what we have told before, ought not to have produced such painful and bitter feelings in the breast of Albert of Morseiul as they did produce. They were those words which referred to the prohibition about to be decreed against the marriages of Protestants and Catholics. What was it to him, he asked himself, whether Catholics and Protestants might or might not marry? Was not his determination taken with regard to the only person whom he could have ever loved? and did it matter that another barrier was placed between them, when there were barriers impassable before? But still he felt the announcement deeply and painfully; reason had no power to check and overcome those sensations; and oppressed and overloaded as his mind then was, it wandered vaguely from misery to misery, and seemed to take a pleasure in calling up everything that could increase its own pain and anguish.

When he had thus ridden along for somewhat more than two miles, he suddenly heard a horn winded lowly in the distance, and, as he fancied, the cry of dogs. It called to his mind his promise to Clémence de Marly. He felt that his frame of mind was in strange contrast with a gay hunting scene. Yet he had promised to go as soon as ever he was free, and he was not a man to break his promise, even when it was a light one. He turned his horse's head, then, in the direction of the spot from which the sound seemed to proceed, still going on slowly and gloomily.

A moment after he heard the sounds again. The memory of happy days, and of his old forest sports, came upon him, and he made a strong effort against the darker spirit in his bosom.

"I will drive these gloomy thoughts from me," he

said, "if it be but for an hour; I will yet know one bright moment more. For this day I will be a boy again, and to-morrow I will cast all behind me, and plunge into the stream of care and strife!"

As he thus thought he touched his horse with the spur; the gallant beast bounded off like lightning; the cry of the hounds, the sound of the horns came nearer and nearer; and in a few moments more the count came suddenly upon a relay of horses and dogs, established upon the side of a hill, as was then customary, for the purpose of giving fresh vigour to the chase when it had been abated by weariness.

"Is the deer expected to pass here?" demanded the count, speaking to one of the *veneurs*, and judging instantly, by his own practised eye, that it would take another direction.

"The young Marquis Hericourt thought so," replied the man, "but he knows nothing about it."

At that moment the gallant stag itself was seen, at the distance of about half a mile, bounding along in the upland towards a point directly opposite; and the count, knowing that he must come upon the hunt at the turn of the valley, spurred on at all speed, followed by his attendants. In a few minutes more a few of the huntsmen were seen; and in another, Clémence de Marly was before his eyes. She was glowing with exercise and eagerness, her eyes bright as stars, her clustering hair floating back from her face, her whole aspect like that which she bore when first he saw her in all the brightness of her youth and beauty. The chevalier was seen at a distance amusing himself by teasing, almost into madness, a fiery horse, that was eager to bound forward before all the rest; the train of suiters and of flatterers that generally followed her was scattered about the field; and, in a moment—with his hat off, his dark hair curling round his brow, his features lighted up with a smile which was strangely mingled with the strong lines of deep emotion just passed, like the sun scattering the remnants of a thunder-cloud; with his chest thrown forward, his head bending to a graceful salute, and his person erect as a column—Albert of Morseiul was by the side of Clémence de Marly, and galloping on with her, seeming but of one piece with the noble animal that bore him.

The eyes of almost all those that followed or were

around were turned to those two ; and certainly almost everything else in the gay and splendid scene through which they moved seemed to go out, extinguished by the comparison. In the whole air, and aspect, and figure of each, there was that clear, concentrated expression of grace, dignity, and power, that seems almost immortal ; so that the Duke de Rouvré and his train, the gay nobles, the dogs, the huntsmen, and the whole array, were for an instant forgotten. Men forgot even themselves for a time to wonder and admire.

Unconscious that such was the case, Albert de Morseiul and Clémence de Marly rode on ; and he—with his fate, as he conceived, sealed, and his determination taken—cast off all cold and chilling restraint, and appeared what he really was ; nay, more, appeared what he was when eager, animated, and with all the fine qualities of his heart and mind welling over in a moment of excitement. All the tales that she had heard of him, as he appeared in the battle-field or in the moment of difficulty and danger, were now realized to the mind of Clémence de Marly ; and while she wondered and enjoyed, she felt that for the first time in her life she had met with one to whom her own high heart and spirit must yield. Her eyes sunk beneath the eagle gaze of his ; her hand held the rein more timidly ; new feelings came upon her, doubts of her own sufficiency, of her own courage, of her own strength, of her own beauty, of her own worthiness : she felt that she had admired and esteemed Albert of Morseiul before, but she felt that there was something more strange, more potent in her bosom now.

We must pause on no other scene of that hunting. Throughout the whole of that afternoon the count gave way to the same spirit. Whether alone with Clémence or surrounded by others, the high and powerful mind broke forth with fearless energy. A bright and poetical imagination ; a clear and cultivated understanding ; a decision of character and of tone, founded on the consciousness of rectitude and of great powers ; a wit as graceful as it was keen, aided by the advantages of striking beauty, and a deep-toned voice of striking melody, left every one so far behind, so out of all comparison, that even the vainest there felt it themselves, and felt it with mortification and anger. The hunting was over, and, by chance or by design, Albert of Morseiul was

placed next to Clémence de Marly at supper. The Duke de Rouvré had noticed the brightening change which had come over his young friend, and, attributing it to a wrong cause, he said good-humouredly,

"Monsieur de Morseiul, happy am I to see you shake off your sadness. You are so much more cheerful that I doubt not you have heard good news to-day."

This was spoken at some distance across the table, and every one heard it; but the young count replied calmly, "Alas! no, my lord; I was determined to have one more day of happiness, and therefore cast away every other thought but the pleasure of the society by which I was surrounded. I gave way to that pleasure altogether this day, because I am sorry to say I must quit your hospitable roof to-morrow, in order to return to Morseiul, fearing that I shall not be able to come to Poitiers again while I remain in this part of France."

Clémence de Marly turned very pale, but then again the blood rushed powerfully over her face. But the Duke de Rouvré, by replying immediately, called attention away from her.

"Nay, nay, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "you promised me to stay for several days longer, and I cannot part with an old friend, and the son of an old friend, so soon."

"I said, my lord, that I would stay if it were possible," replied the count. "But I can assure you that it is not possible; various important causes of the greatest consequence, not only to me, but to the state, call me imperatively away, when, indeed, there are but too many inducements to stay here."

"I know one of the causes," said the duke; "I hear you have taken measures for suppressing that daring band of plunderers—*night-hawks*, as they call themselves—who have for some time hung about that part of the country, and who got possession of poor Monsieur Pellisson and Monsieur St. Helie, as they were telling me the other day; but you might trust that to your seneschals, count."

"Indeed I cannot, my lord duke," replied the count; "that affair has more branches than you know of; or, perhaps I should say, more roots to be eradicated. Besides, there are many other things."

"Well, well," said the duke, "if it must be so, it must. However, as soon as the states have ceased to hold

their meetings, I shall come for a little repose to Ruffigny, and then, if you have not been fully successful, I will do my best to help you; but we are not going to lose our friend Louis here too. Chevalier, do you go back with your friend?"

"Not to hunt robbers," replied the chevalier, with a smile; "I would almost as soon hunt rats with the dauphin. Besides, he has never asked me; this is the first intelligence I had of his intention."

"I only formed it this morning," replied the count. "But you have promised me a whole month, Louis, and you shall give it me when you find it most pleasant to yourself."

"Well, I shall linger on here for a few days," replied the chevalier, "if the governor will feed and lodge me; and then, when I have seen all the bright things that are done by the states, I will come and join you at Morseiul."

Thus ended the discussion which followed the young count's announcement. No further conversation took place between him and Clémence, who devoted her whole attention during the rest of the evening either to the chevalier, the Duc de Melcourt, or the young Marquis de Hericourt. The hour for Albert de Morseiul's departure was announced as immediately after breakfast on the following day; but Clémence de Marly did not appear that morning at the table, for the first time since his arrival at Poitiers. When the hour was come and his horses were prepared, he took leave of the rest of the party, and, with many painful emotions at his heart, quitted the saloon, the duke and the chevalier, with one or two others, accompanying him to the top of the stairs. At that moment, however, as he was about to descend, Clémence appeared as if going into the saloon. She was somewhat paler than usual, but her manner was the same as ever.

"So, Monsieur de Morseiul," she said, "you are going! I wish you a happy journey;" and thus, treating him like a mere common acquaintance, she bowed her head and entered the saloon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISCOVERY.

Two days after the departure of the Count de Morseiul, the states of the province were opened in form; but neither with the states nor with their proceedings shall we have anything to do, and will merely notice an event which occurred on the eve of their meeting.

On the day preceding, a vast number of gentlemen from all parts of the province had flocked into the city. The house of the governor was again filled to the very doors, and though the formal opening of the states was deferred till the succeeding day, they nominally commenced their assembly on the day after the count's departure. The colleagues, Pelisson and St. Helie, had separated after their arrival in Poitiers, the former having gone to the bishop's palace, where he busied himself in his usual occupation at this time, namely, in diffusing large sums of money through the province by different channels, for the purpose of bribing all persons who might be found weak or wavering in the Protestant faith to abandon their religion and profess themselves Catholics. St. Helie had remained at the house of the governor, following occupations more suited to his genius, that of watching everything that was done, of gaining information concerning the views and feelings of all persons likely to be present at the assembly of the states, and of endeavouring to form a party for his own purposes amid the more fierce, intolerant, and bigoted of the influential Catholics of the province.

The Duke de Rouvré could not avoid showing this personage every sort of civility, for, indeed, such was the king's command; but, at the same time, he could not conceal from himself that the abbé was a spy upon his actions, and was intended to be a check upon his conduct, and, as may well be supposed under such circumstances, he was not particularly pleased with his guest.

On the day preceding the regular opening of the states, then, after some of the preliminary formalities

had been gone through, the Duc de Rouvré, while conversing in his saloon with twelve or fourteen of the principal Roman Catholic gentry, who had come to visit him as if by accident, but, in reality, by a previous arrangement with others, was not agreeably surprised to see the Abbé de St. Helie, followed by Pelisson and the Curé of Guadrioul, enter the room in somewhat a formal manner, and advance towards him with a face of business. He bowed low, however, as it was the first time he had seen the abbé that morning, greeted Pelisson somewhat more warmly, and suffered the third personage of the party to walk up in bull-like sullenness with nothing but a formal inclination of the head.

"It is time, my lord," said the Abbé de St. Helie, "to fulfil the order of the king, and to open in your presence the commission with which he has intrusted us, of the nature of which we are ourselves in some sort ignorant up to this moment."

"I thought, gentlemen," said the duke, "that you informed me the commission was not to be opened till after the opening of the states."

"No, my lord," replied the abbé, "I said till after the meeting of the states, which were convened to meet to-day."

"Well, then, gentlemen," said the duke, "I will give you my attention in a few minutes. You see I am at present occupied with friends, but in half an hour I shall be prepared to receive you in my cabinet upon any business that may remain to be transacted between us."

"I see no reason, my lord," replied the abbé, "why the commission should not be opened before the gentlemen here present, all of whom are sincere Christians and zealous supporters of the true faith."

"No earthly reason whatever," replied the duke, sharply, "except that I choose to do my own business in my own way, in my own house, and in my own government."

"I am sorry to suggest any alterations in your lordship's plans," replied the abbé, with a cool sneer, "but I have authority for what I am doing. The king's express directions are to open the commission in presence of your lordship, and other competent witnesses."

"Oh, if such be the case," said the duke, much mortified, "there could be no witnesses more competent, and

none, perhaps, better prepared than the present. Pray open your commission, gentlemen. My good sirs, take your seats round this table. Let us give the matter, if possible, some air of regularity. Without there! Send for my secretary. We will wait till he comes, if you please, Monsieur de St. Helie. What splendid weather this is, gentlemen. We have not had one wet day for nearly two months, and yet a gentle rain every morning."

The persons present ranged themselves round the table, the Curé de Guadrioul produced the leathern bag which contained the commission, and laid it down heavily before him, and, as soon as the duke's secretary appeared, a large knot upon the leathern strings of the bag was cut with a penknife, and the whole packet handed to the Abbé de St. Helie, who had placed himself at the governor's right hand. Opening the mouth of the bag, then, the abbé took forth a large parchment packet, sealed up at both ends with the royal arms of France. The governor asked to look at the superscription, and finding it addressed in the usual terms to the Abbés St. Helie and Pelisson, he gave it back to the former, who, with an important countenance and slow formality, began to break the seals.

Two or three paper covers were within, in order to keep the precious document secure, and one by one the abbé unfolded them till he came to the last, which was also sealed, but which was much smaller than the size of the outer parcel had given reason to expect. He broke the seal himself, however, and produced the contents, when, to the astonishment of everybody and the merriment of the younger persons present, there appeared nothing but a pack of cards.

The Duc de Rouvré looked on dryly; not a smile curled his countenance; and he said, gazing at the Abbé de St. Helie, who sat in stupified silence,

"I admire the sagacity and propriety with which it has been judged necessary to appoint witnesses for the opening of this commission—or of this game, perhaps I ought to say, Monsieur de St. Helie. Gentlemen, I trust that you are perfectly satisfied; but I must ask you whether it be necessary to direct my secretary to take a procès verbal of the contents, import, and extent of the abbé's commission?"

In the mean time Pelisson had reached across, and

taken up the papers which had surrounded the cards. He examined them minutely and long; but at length replied to the duke's sneer by saying,

"Perhaps it may be more necessary, my lord, than you imagine. It seems to me, from the appearance of these papers, that the packet has been opened before. There is a slight tear in the parchment, which tear is evidently not new."

"You must look to that yourselves, gentlemen," said the Duc de Rouvré, seriously angry; "the commission has been in your charge and custody, and in that of no one else. You best know whether you have opened it before the time or not. Secretary, as these gentlemen demand it, make a note that we have this day seen opened by the Abbé de St. Helie in our presence a packet addressed to him and Monsieur de Pelisson, purporting to be a commission for certain purposes addressed to them by his most Christian majesty; and that, on the said packet being so opened, there has been found in it nothing but a pack of cards, not in the most cleanly condition."

"Pray let him add," said Pelisson, "that I have declared my opinion, from the appearance of the papers, that the said packet had been previously opened."

"Let that also be noted," said the duke; "but it must be noted also that Monsieur de Pelisson did not make that observation till after the packet had been opened, and the cards discovered; that the seals were unbroken, and the leathern bag entire; and now, gentlemen," he continued, "after having interrupted my conversation with these noble gentlemen here present to witness the opening of a pack of cards—which may, indeed, be the commencement of a game that I don't understand—perhaps you will excuse me for rising and resuming our more agreeable occupation."

Pelisson bowed his head, calm and undisturbed; the Abbé de St. Helie looked stupified, mortified, and angry beyond all measure; and the dull priest of Guadrioul, upon whom the eyes of both of his superiors were turned from time to time with an expression of no very doubtful import, looked swallowed up in stolid fear and astonishment. The governor and his guests in general had risen and scattered themselves about the room; and, after speaking to the Abbé de St. Helie for a few moments, Pelisson advanced, and took his leave in a

few words, saying that of course it was their duty to inform the king of what had occurred, and that, therefore, they must proceed to write quickly before the ordinary set out.

The governor bowed stiffly, and merely replied that he himself could not think of troubling the king upon a trifle of such minor importance, and therefore left them to make their communication in their own terms. The three then retired, and the rest of the party soon after separated; but the worthy governor had not been left half an hour before he received a billet from the bishop, requesting an audience, which was immediately granted. He came, accompanied by Pelisson and the Curé de Guadrioul, who remained without while the archbishop and his companion held a previous conference with the governor. The curé was then called in, and remained some time with them. He was then sent out again to the antechamber, then recalled, and nearly two hours passed in what was apparently an unpleasant discussion; for, at the end of that time, when the governor returned to the saloon from his own cabinet, Clémence de Marly, the duchess, and the Chevalier d'Evrans all remarked that he was very much agitated and heated.

In a minute or two afterward his secretary followed him into the room with a note, apparently just written, in his hand, and asked if that would do.

The governor read the note, and replied, "Yes! Send it off directly," he said. "Bid the messenger give my very best regards to the Count de Morseuil! Lay the strictest injunctions upon him also not to stop this night till he has overtaken the count. If the count be in bed when he reaches the place where he is, he need not, of course, disturb him till the morning. But bid him say everything that is kind from me."

Clémence de Marly rose, and with a winning grace that was more natural to her than the capricious pride she sometimes assumed, walked up to the duke, glided her arm through his, and drew the old nobleman into one of the deep windows. She spoke with him for several minutes earnestly, and he replied as if endeavouring to parry by a jest some question he did not choose to answer.

"Nay, nay," she was heard to say at length, "my

dear guardian, you *shall* tell me, and you know that Clémence is more absolute than the king."

"We will talk about it to-morrow, Clémence," replied the duke, "and perhaps I may tell you; but you shall make your confession in return, fair lady."

She blushed a little and turned away, and thus the conversation ended.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECALL.

ALBERT of Morseiul rode on his way with a heart ill at ease. The excitement of the preceding night was gone, and the lassitude that succeeded it was like the weakness after a fever. It seemed to him that the last cheerful hours of life were over, and the rest was all to be strife and anguish; that the last of all the sweet dreams, with which hope and youth deck the future, were done and passed away, and nothing but the stern gray reality was left. It is hard and sorrowful to make up the mind to any parting, and tenfold more hard and sorrowful to make up the mind to our parting with the sweet promising fancies of our early days; to put ourselves under a harsher guide for ever, and follow with him a rugged and a cheerless path, when before we had been treading on sweet sunshiny flowers. In general, it is true, the wise beneficence of Heaven has provided that we should not part with all at once, but that the visions and the dreams, like the many gay companions of our boyhood, should either be abandoned for others, or drop away from our side, one by one, till all are gone, and we hardly mark which is the last. But there are times when all are snatched away together, or, as in the case of Albert of Morseiul, when the last that is taken is the brightest and the best, and the parting is clear, defined, and terrible.

Bitter, bitter, then, were his feelings as he rode away from Poitiers, and made up his mind that the last dream of youth was over; that the nourished vision of long years was dissipated; that the bubble was burst, and

that all was gone ; that she who, half ideal, half real, had been that object round which both memory and imagination had clung as the something splendid for the future, was not what he had dreamed of, and, even if she were, could never, never be his ; and that, at length, that theme of thought was gone from him for ever. That moment and that spot seemed to form the parting place where youth, imagination, and happiness were left behind, and care, reality, and anxiety started forward with latter life.

Though, as we have endeavoured on more than one occasion to show, the Count de Morseiul was a man of strong imagination and of deep and intense feelings, yet he possessed qualities of other kinds, which served to counterbalance and to rule those dangerous gifts, not, indeed, preventing them from having their effect upon himself, paining, grieving, and wearing him, but sufficient to prevent imagination from clouding his judgment, or strong feeling from warping his conduct from the stern path which judgment dictated. He applied himself, then, to examine distinctly what were the probabilities of the future, and what was the line of conduct that it became him to pursue. He doubted not—indeed, he felt strongly convinced—that Clémence de Marly would ultimately give her hand to the Chevalier d'Evrau, to his friend and companion. He believed that, for the time, some accidental circumstance might have alienated them from each other, and that, perhaps on both sides, any warmer and more eager passion that they once had felt might have been a little cooled ; but still he doubted not, from all he saw, that Clémence would yet be his friend's bride, and the first part of his own task was to prepare his mind to bear that event with calmness, and firmness, and dignity, whenever it should happen. As his thoughts reverted, however, to the situation of his fellow Huguenots and the probable fate that awaited them, he saw a prospect of relief from the agony of his own personal feelings in the strife that was likely to ensue from their persecution ; and perhaps he drew a hope even from the prospect of an early grave.

With such thoughts struggling in his breast, and with all the varied emotions which the imagination of the reader may well supply, Albert of Morseiul rode on till he reached the house appointed for his second resting-place. Everything had been prepared for his reception,

and all the external appliances were ready to ensure comfort, so that there was not even any little bodily want or irritation to withdraw his attention from the gloomy pictures presented by his own thoughts.

With a tact in such matters which was peculiarly his own, Jerome Riquet took especial care that the dinner set before his master should be of the very simplest kind; and, instead of crowding the room with servants, as he had done on a former occasion, he, who on the journey acted the part of major-domo, waited upon the count at table alone, only suffering another servant to carry in and remove the dishes. He had taken the precaution of bringing with him some wine from Poitiers, which he had induced the sommelier of the archbishop to pilfer from the best bin in his master's cellar; and he now endeavoured to seduce his master, whose deep depression he had seen and deplored during their journey, into taking more of the fragrant juice than usual, not, indeed, by saying one word upon the subject, but by filling his glass whenever he saw it empty.

Now Jerome Riquet would have given the tip of one of his ears to have been made quite sure of what was the chief cause of the count's anxiety. That he was anxious about the state of the Protestant cause the valet well knew; that he was in some degree moved by feelings of love towards Clémence de Marly, Riquet very easily divined. But Jerome Riquet was, as we have before said on more than one occasion, shrewd and intelligent, and in nothing more so than in matters where the heart was concerned. It is true he had never been in the room five times when Clémence and his master were together, but there are such things in the world wherein we live as half open doors, chinks, keyholes, and garret windows; and in the arts and mysteries of all these Jerome Riquet was a most decided proficient. He had thus seen quite enough to make him feel very sure, that whatever might be Clémence de Marly's feelings towards others, her feelings towards his master were not by any means unfavourable; and, after much speculation, he had arranged in his own mind—from a knowledge of the somewhat chivalrous generosity in his master's character—that he and the Chevalier d'Evran were in love with the same person, and that the count, even with the greater probability of success, had aban-

doned the pursuit of his passion rather than become the rival of his friend.

Riquet wished much to be assured of this fact, however; and to know whether it was really and truly the proximate cause of the melancholy he beheld, or whether there was some deeper and more powerful motive still, concealed from those eyes which he thought were privileged to pry into every secret of his master. Thus, after dinner was over, and the dessert was put upon the table—though he had wisely forbore up to that moment to do, to say, or to allow anything that could disturb the train of the count's thoughts—he could resist no longer, and again quickly filled up his young lord's glass as he saw it empty.

His master put it aside with the back of his hand, saying, "No more!"

"Oh, my lord," said Riquet, "you will not surely refuse to drink that glass to the health of Mademoiselle Clémence!"

The count, who knew him thoroughly, and, in general, perceived very clearly all the turnings and windings through which he pursued his purposes, turned round, gazing in his face for a moment as he bent over his shoulder, and then replied with a melancholy smile, "Certainly not, Riquet. Health and happiness to her!" and he drank the wine.

The look and the words were quite sufficient for Jerome Riquet, though the count was not aware that it would be so; but the cunning valet saw clearly that, whatever other causes might mingle with the melancholy of his master, love for Clémence de Marly had a principal share therein; and, confirmed in his own opinion of his lord's motive in quitting Poitiers, his first thought, when he cleared away and left him, was, by what artful scheme or cunning device he could carry him back to Poitiers against his own will, and plunge him inextricably into the pursuit of her he loved.

Several plans suggested themselves to his mind, which was fertile in all such sort of intrigues, and it is very probable that, though he had to do with a keen and a clear-sighted man, he might have succeeded unaided in his object; but he suddenly received assistance which he little expected, by the arrival, at their first resting-place, of a courier from the Duc de Rouvré, towards the hour of ten at night.

Riquet was instantly called to the messenger; and, telling him that the count was so busy that he could see nobody at that moment, the valet charged himself with the delivery of the note and the message, while the governor's servant sat down to refresh himself after a long and fatiguing ride. Riquet took a lamp with him to light himself up the stairs, though he had gone up and down all night without any; and, before he reached the door of the count's room, he had, of course, made himself acquainted with the whole contents of the note, so that, when he returned to the kitchen to converse with the messenger, he was perfectly prepared to cross-examine him upon the various transactions at Poitiers with sagacity and acuteness.

The whole story of the cards found in the king's packet had, of course, made a great sensation in the household of the governor, and Riquet now laughed immoderately at the tale, declaring most irreverently that he had never known Louis le Grand was such a wag. There is nothing like laughter for opening the doors of the heart, and letting its secrets troop out by dozens. The courier joined in the merriment of the valet, and Riquet had no difficulty in extracting from him everything else that he knew. The after conferences between the governor, Pelisson, and the archbishop, were displayed as far as the messenger had power to withdraw the veil, and the general opinion entertained in the governor's household that some suspicion attached to the young count in regard to that packet, and that the courier himself had been sent to recall him to Poitiers, was also communicated in full to the valet. To the surprise of the courier, however, Riquet laughed more inordinately than ever, declaring that the governor, and the archbishop, and St. Helie, and Pelisson, must all have been mad or drunk when they were so engaged.

In the mean time the Count de Morseiul had opened the letter from the governor, and read the contents, which informed him that a pack of cards had been found, in place of a commission, in the packet given by the king to Messieurs St. Helie and Pelisson; that those gentlemen declared that the packet had been opened; and that they had come with the bishop for the purpose of making formal application to recall him, the Count de Morseiul, to Poitiers, alleging that the only period at which the real commission could have been abstracted

was while they were in his company at an inn on the road. They had also pointed out, the duke said, that the count, as one of the principal Protestant leaders, was a person more interested than any other, both to ascertain the contents of that packet, and to abstract the commission in case its contents were such as they imagined them to have been ; and, at the same time, they said, there was good reason to believe that, in consequence of the knowledge thus obtained, he, the Count de Morseiul, had called together a meeting of Protestant gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Poitiers, had communicated to them the plans and purposes of the government, and had concerted schemes for frustrating the king's designs. The Duc de Rouvré then went on to say, that, as he knew and fully confided in the honour and integrity of the Count de Morseiul, and as the bishop and Monsieur Pelisson had produced no corroborative proof of their allegation whatsoever, he by no means required or demanded the count to return to Poitiers, but thought fit to communicate to him the facts, and to leave him to act according to his own judgment.

The count paced the room in no slight agitation for several minutes after he had read the letter ; but it was not the abstraction of the king's commission, if such an act had really taken place, nor the accusation insinuated, rather than made, against himself, which agitated him on the present occasion. The accusation he regarded as absurd, the abstraction of the commission merely laughable ; a suspicion indeed might cross his mind that Riquet had had a hand in it, but he knew well that he himself had none, and therefore he cast the matter from his mind at once. But his agitation proceeded from the thought of being obliged to go back to Poitiers ; from the fear of seeing all his good resolutions overthrown ; from the idea of meeting once more, surrounded with greater difficulties and dangers than ever, her whom he now but too clearly felt to be the only being that he had ever loved.

To the emotions which such considerations produced, he gave up a considerable time, and then, taking up the bell, he rang it sharply, ordering the page that appeared to send Riquet to him. He simply told the valet what had occurred, and ordered his horses to be saddled to return to Poitiers the next morning at daybreak. He

insinuated no suspicion, though he fixed his eyes strongly upon the man's countenance when he spoke of the abstraction of the commission; but the face of Riquet changed not in the least, except in consequence of a slight irrepressible chuckle which took place at the mention of the appearance of the cards. The count did not wish to inquire into the matter, but, from what he saw of Riquet's manner, he judged that his servant had nothing to do with the transaction; and, setting out early the next morning, he went back to Poitiers at full speed, hiring horses when his own were too tired to proceed, so that he reached the house of the governor towards nine o'clock on the same night.

He was immediately ushered into the saloon, where the family of Monsieur de Rouvré and a very small party besides were assembled, and, apologizing for the dustiness and disarray of his appearance to the duke, who met him near the door, he said that he had only presented himself to show that he had lost not a moment in returning to repel the false insinuations made against him. He was then about to leave the room, hastily glancing his eye over the party beyond, and seeing that his friend the chevalier was not present; but the voice of the Duchess de Rouvré called him to her side, saying,

"We will all, I am sure, excuse dust and disarray for the pleasure of Monsieur de Morseiul's society. Is it not so, Madame de Beaune! Is it not so, Clémence?"

Clémence had scarcely looked up since the count's arrival, but she now did so with a slight inclination of the head, and replied, "The Count de Morseiul, my queen, values the pleasure of his society so highly that he is disposed to give us but little of it, it would appear."

The words were scarcely spoken when the count, with his own peculiar, graceful, but energetic manner, walked straight up to Clémence de Marly, and stopped opposite to her, saying gravely, but not angrily, "I assure you, dear lady, I do not deserve your sarcasm. If you knew, on the contrary, how great was the pleasure that I myself have derived from this society, you would estimate the sacrifice I made in quitting it, and approve, rather than condemn, the self-command and resolution I have shown."

Clémence looked suddenly up in his face with one of her bright beaming smiles, and then frankly extended

her hand to him. "I was wrong," she said; "forgive me, Monsieur de Morseiul! You know a spoiled woman always thinks she has done penance enough when she has forced herself to say I was wrong."

If the whole world had been present, Albert of Morseiul could not have refrained from bending down his lips to that fair hand; but he did so calmly and respectfully; and then, turning to the duchess, he said that, if she would permit him, he would but do away the dust and disarray of his apparel, and return in a moment. The petition was not, of course, refused: his toilet was hasty, and occupied but a few minutes; and he returned as quickly as possible to the hall, where he passed the rest of the evening without giving any farther thoughts or words to painful themes, except in asking the governor to beg the presence of the bishop, Monsieur Pelisson, and the Abbé de St. Helie as early as possible on the following morning, in order that the whole business might be over before the hour appointed for the meeting of the states.

The bishop, who was an eager and somewhat bigoted man, was quite willing to pursue the matter at once; and, before breakfast on the following day, he, with the two abbés and the Curé de Guadrieul, met the Count de Morseiul in the cabinet of the governor.

There was something in the frank, upright, and gallant bearing of the young nobleman that impressed even the superstitious bigots to whom he was opposed with feelings of doubt as to the truth of their own suspicions, and even with some sensations of shame for having urged those suspicions almost in the form of direct charges. They hesitated, therefore, as to the mode of their attack; and the count, impatient of delay, commenced the business at once by addressing the bishop.

"My noble friend, the duke here present," he said, "has communicated to me, my lord, both by letter and by word of mouth, a strange scene that has been enacted here regarding a commission, real or supposed, given by the king to the Abbés of St. Helie and Pelisson. It seems that, when the packet supposed to contain the commission was produced, a pack of cards was found therein instead of what was expected; that Monsieur Pelisson found reason to suppose that the packet had been previously opened; and that he then did—what Monsieur Pelisson should not have done, considering

the acquaintance that he has with me and with my character—namely, charged me with having opened, by some private means, the packet containing his commission, abstracted and destroyed the commission itself, and substituted a pack of cards in its place.”

“Stop, stop, my dear count,” said Pelisson, “you are mistaken as to the facts. I never made such an accusation, whatever others did. All I said was, that you were the only person interested in the abstraction of that commission who had possessed any opportunity of destroying it.”

“And in so saying, sir, you spoke falsely,” replied the Count de Morseiul; “for, in the first place, you insinuated what was not the case, that I have had an opportunity of destroying it; and, in the next place, you forgot that for three quarters of an hour, or perhaps more, for aught I know, your whole baggage was in the hands of a body of plunderers, while neither you, buried in your devotions, under the expectation of immediate death, nor Monsieur de St. Helie, weeping, trembling, and insane in the agony of unmanly fear, had the slightest knowledge of what was done with anything in your possession; so that the plunderers, if they had chosen it, might have rewritten you a new commission, ordering you both to be scourged back from Poitiers to Paris. I only say this to show the absurdity of the insinuations you have put forth. Here, in a journey which has probably taken you seven or eight days to perform, in the course of which you must have slept at seven or eight different inns upon the road, and during which you were for a length of time in the hands of a body of notorious plunderers, you only choose to fix upon me, who entertained you with civility and kindness, who delivered you from death itself, and who saved from the flames and restored to your own hands, at the risk of my life, the very commission which you now insinuate I had some share in abstracting from the paper that contained it. Besides, sir, if I remember rightly, that packet was intrusted to the care of a personage attendant upon yourselves, and who watched it like the fabled guardian of the golden fleece.”

“But the guardian of the fleece slumbered, sir,” replied Pelisson, who, to say the truth, was really ashamed of the charge which had been brought against the Count de Morseiul, and was very glad of an opportunity to

escape from the firm grasp of the count's arguments by a figure of speech. "Besides, Monsieur de Morseuil," he said, "had you but listened a little longer, you would have heard that, though I said yours was the only party which had an opportunity of taking it and were interested in its destruction, I never charged you with doing so or commanding it to be done; but I said that some of your servants, thinking to do you a pleasure, might have performed the exchange, which certainly must have been accomplished with great sleight of hand."

"You do not escape me so, sir," replied the young count; "if I know anything of the laws of the land, or, indeed, of the laws of common sense and right reason, you are first bound to prove that a crime has been committed before you dare to accuse any one of committing it. You must show that there ever has been, in reality, a commission in that packet. If I understood Monsieur de Rouvré's letter right, the seals of the king were found unbroken on the packet, and not the slightest appearance of its having been opened was remarked, till you, Monsieur Pelisson, discovered that there was such an appearance after the fact. The king may have been jesting with you; Monsieur de Louvois may have been making sport of you; a drunken clerk of the cabinet may have committed some blunder in a state of inebriety; no crime may have been committed at all, for aught we know."

"My good sir," said the bishop, haughtily, "you show how little you know of the king and of the court of the king by supposing that any such transactions could take place."

"My lord," replied the count, gazing upon him with a smile of ineffable contempt, "when you were a little curé in the small town of Castelnaudry, my father supported the late King of France with his right hand and with the voice of his counsel; when you were trooping after a band of rebels in the train of the house of Vendôme, I was page of honour to our present gracious monarch, in dangers and difficulties, in scantiness, and in want; when you have been fattening in a rich diocese, obtained by no services to the crown, I have fought beside my monarch, and led his troops up to the cannon of his enemies' ramparts; I have sat beside him in his council of war, and ever have been graciously received by him in the midst of his court; and let me tell you,

my lord bishop, that it is not more improbable, nay, not more impossible, that Louis XIV. should play a scurvy jest upon two respectable ecclesiastics, than that the Count of Morseiul should open a paper not addressed to himself."

"Both good and true, my young friend," said the Duc de Rouvré; "no one who knows you could suspect you of such a thing for a moment."

"But we may his servants," said the Abbé de St. Helie, sharply, though he had hitherto remained silent, knowing that he himself had been the chief instigator of the charge, and fearing to call upon himself the indignation of the young count.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Count de Morseiul, "although I should have every right to demand that you should first of all establish the absolute fact of the abstraction of this packet upon proper testimony, I will not only permit, but even demand, that all my servants who accompanied me from Morseiul shall be brought in and examined one by one: and if you find any of them to whom you can fairly attach any suspicion, I will give him up to you at once, to do what you think fit with. I have communicated to them the contents of Monsieur de Rouvré's letter, but have said nothing further to them on the subject. They must all be arrived by this time: I beg that you would call them in yourselves in what order you please."

"By your leave, by your leave," said the Abbé de St. Helie, seeing that the bishop was about to speak; "we will have your valet; Jerome—I think I heard him so called. Let us have him, if you please."

Jerome was accordingly brought in, and appeared with a face of worthy astonishment.

Having in this instance not to deal with the count, of whom he stood in some degree of awe, though that awe did not in the least diminish his malevolence, the Abbé de St. Helie proceeded to conduct the examination of Riquet himself. "You, Master Jerome Riquet," he commenced, "you are, I presume, of the church pretending to be reformed?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Riquet, in a tone of well-assumed horror. "No, reverend sir, I am of the Holy Roman and Apostolical Church, and have never yet gone astray from it."

This announcement did not well suit the purposes of

6, who, judging from the intolerant feelings of a heart, had never doubted that the confidential of the young count would be found to be a zeal-guenot. He exclaimed, however, "I am glad to I am glad to hear it! But let us speak a little Monsieur Jerome. It was you, I think, who d from under our good brother here, Monsieur de Guadrieul, a certain sheep-leather bag, con-sur commission from his majesty. Was it not

rtainly did gently withdraw from under the rev-entleman," replied Riquet, "a bag on which he ing, and which he took back again, as you saw, g it to be the king's commission for exterminie Huguenots, which did my soul good to hear. t back with all reverence, as you saw, and had my hands a minute, though I did think—though leed know—"

think? did know what?" demanded the abbé. ; it could not have been in safer hands than dded Riquet; and though St. Helie urged him ntly, he could get him to give him no farther ion. Angry at being foiled—and such, proba-the result that Riquet intended to produce—lost all caution and reserve. "Come, come, Jerome Riquet," he exclaimed, in a sharp voice, come; remember that there is such a place as ile. Tell us the truth, sir! tell us the truth! per was stolen! You evidently know some-out it! Tell us the truth, or means shall be make you. Now, answer me! If your bag-re searched at this moment, would not the e found therein—or have you dared to destroy

e Riquet now affected to bristle up in turn. His shed, his large nostrils expanded like a pair of shers, and he replied, "No, abbé, no; neither nor the other. But since I, one of the king's ral Catholic subjects, am accused in this way, peak out. I will say that you two gentlemen ave taken better care of the commission your-and that, though not one scrap will be found in se, or in the baggage of any other person be-to my lord, I would not be answerable that

more than a scrap was not found among the baggage of some that are accusing others."

"How now, sirrah," cried the Abbé de St. Helie, "do you dare to say that either Monsieur Pelisson or I—"

"Nothing about either of you two reverend sirs," replied the valet; "nothing about either of you two! But first let my valise be brought in and examined. Monsieur has been pleased to say that there is something there; and I swear by everything I hold dear, or by any other oath your reverences please, that I have not touched a thing in it since I heard of this business about the cards. Let it be brought in, I say, and examined. May I tell the people without, my lord duke, to bring in everything I have in the world, and lay it down here before you?"

The duke immediately assented; and, while Jerome Riquet, without entirely leaving the room, bade the attendants in the antechamber bring in everything, everything they could find in his room, St. Helie and Pelisson looked in each other's faces with glances of some embarrassment and wonder, while the Count de Marseiul gazed sternly down on the table, firmly believing that Master Jerome Riquet was engaged in playing off some specious trick, which he himself could not detect, and was bound not to expose.

The goods and chattels of the valet were brought in, and a various and motley display they made; for whether he had arranged the whole on purpose out of sheer impudence, or had left matters to take their course accidentally, his valise presented a number of objects certainly not his own property, and to most of which his master, if he had remarked them, might have laid claim. The count was silent, however; and though the manifold collection of silk stockings, ribands, lace, doublets, &c., &c., &c., were drawn forth to the very bottom, yet nothing the least bearing upon the question of the abstraction of the commission was found throughout the whole.

As he shook the last vest, to show that there was nothing in it, a smile of triumph shone upon the countenance of Jerome Riquet, and he demanded, "Now, gentlemen, are you satisfied that I have no share in this business?"

The Abbé de St. Helie was hastening to acknowledge that he was satisfied, for he was timid as well as ma-

levolent; and having lost the hold which he thought he might have had on Jerome Riquet, the menacing words which the valet had made use of filled his mind with apprehensions, lest some suspicion should be raised up in the mind of the king or of Louvois that he himself had had a share in the disappearance of the paper. Not so, however, Pelisson, who, though he had learned the lesson of sycophancy and flattery with wonderful aptitude, was naturally a man of courage and resolution; and, before Monsieur de St. Helie could well finish what he had to say, he exclaimed aloud,

"Stop, stop, Master Jerome Riquet, we are undoubtedly satisfied that the papers are not in your valise, and I think it probable that you have had nothing to do with the matter; but you threw out an insinuation just now of which we must hear more. What was the meaning of the words you made use of when you said that you would not be answerable that more than a scrap was not found among the baggage of some that are accusing others?"

Jerome Riquet hesitated, and either felt or affected a disinclination to explain himself; but Pelisson persisted, notwithstanding sundry twitches of the sleeve given to him both by the Abbé de St. Helie and the bishop himself.

"I must have this matter cleared up," said Pelisson, "and I do not rise till it is. Explain yourself, sir, or I shall apply both to your lord and to the governor to insist upon your so doing."

Jerome Riquet looked towards the count, who immediately said, "What your meaning was, Riquet, you best know; but you must have had some meaning, and it is fit that you should explain it."

"Well, then," said Riquet, shaking his head upon his shoulders with an important look, "what I mean is this; that if ever I saw a man who had an inclination to see the contents of a packet that did not belong to him, it was Monsieur le Curé de Guadrieul there. He knows very well that he talked to me for half an hour of how easy it would be to get the packet out of the bag, and he seemed to have a very great inclination to do it."

While he made this insinuation, the dull, fat, leaden-looking mass of the Curé de Guadrieul was seen heaving with some internal convulsion: his breath came thick, his cheeks and his breast expanded, his eyes grew

red and fierce, his hands trembled with rage; and, starting up from his seat, he exclaimed,

"Me! me! By the Lord, I will strangle thee with my own hands;" and he sprang towards Jerome Riquet as if to execute his threat, while the governor exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "Sit down, sir; and, as you have joined in accusing others, learn to bear the retaliation, as indeed you must."

"Can he deny what I say?" demanded Riquet, stretching out his three fore fingers, and shaking them in the curé's face; "can he deny that he talked to me for half an hour about the easiness of purloining the commission, and told me of a thousand instances of the same kind that have taken place before now? No, he cannot deny it!"

"I did talk to thee, base miscreant," said the curé, still swelling with rage, "but it was to show why I always sat upon the bag, and slept with it under my head, ever after that affair with the robbers."

"Mark that, gentlemen," said the Count de Morseiul.

"Well, sir, we do mark it," said the bishop; "that proves nothing against the curé but extreme care and precaution."

"Nor can I prove anything directly, monseigneur," cried Riquet; "but still I have a strange suspicion that the very night I speak of did not go over without the fingers of Monsieur le Curé being in the bag. Let me ask him another question, and let him mind how he answers it. Was he, or was he not, seen by more than one person dabbling at the mouth of the bag?"

"That was only to see that the knot was fast," replied the curé, glaring round him with a look of growing bewilderment and horror.

"Ay, ay," continued Riquet, with a glance of calm contempt that almost drove the man mad; "ay, ay, all I wish is that I had an opportunity of looking into your baggage as you have had of looking into mine."

"And so you shall, by Heaven," cried the Duc de Rouvré. "I will have it brought from his chamber this instant."

"I don't care," cried the priest; "let it be brought; you will find nothing there."

But the Abbé de St. Helie and the bishop both interposed. Though Pelisson said nothing, and looked mortified and pained, the others urged everything that they

could think of for the protection of the baggage of the ecclesiastic, without the slightest consideration of equity or justice whatsoever; but the governor was firm, replying,

"Gentlemen, I will be responsible for my conduct both to the king and to the King of kings; and, in one word, I tell you that this baggage shall be examined. You have brought back the Count de Morseiul and his whole train on charges and insinuations which you have not been able to establish; and you would now fain shrink from a little trouble and inconvenience, which ought to be taken, in order to clear one of yourselves of an imputation accompanied by a few singular facts. Maître Riquet, call one of my servants from the door, but do not leave the room yourself."

As soon as the servant appeared, the governor, notwithstanding the renewed opposition of the two ecclesiastics, ordered the whole baggage and effects of the Curé de Guadrieul to be brought down from the chamber that he inhabited. This was accordingly done; and, besides a number of stray articles of apparel almost as miscellaneous in character and appearance as those which the opening of Riquet's valise had displayed, there was a large sort of trunk-mail which appeared to be carefully locked. The curé had looked on with a grim and scowling smile while his various goods and chattels were displayed upon the floor of the governor's cabinet; and then turning to St. Helie with a growl, which might have been supposed to proceed from a calumniated bear, he said,

"Don't be afraid; they can't find anything;" and, advancing to his effects, he shook them one after the other, and turned out the pockets, when there were any, to show that there was nothing concealed. He then produced a large key, and, opening the trunk-mail, took out, one by one, the various things that it contained. He had nearly got to the bottom, and was displaying a store of tobacco-pipes, some of which were wrapped up in pieces of paper, some in their original naked whiteness, when, in the midst of them, appeared what seemed a tobacco-box, also wrapped up in paper.

The moment the eyes of Riquet fell upon it, he exclaimed, "Stop, stop; what is that? There is writing on that paper. Monsieur le Duc, I pray you to examine what is on that paper."

The eyes of the curé, who had it in his hand, fixed for an instant upon the tobacco-box and its envelope, and his fingers instantly relaxed their grasp and suffered it to drop upon the ground. Well, indeed, they might do so, for the very first words that were seen were, "I pray God to have you, Messieurs Pelisson and St. Helie, in his holy care," with the signature of "Louis."

The governor unrolled the paper, which, though it was but a fragment, left not the slightest doubt that it was part either of a commission or of a letter of instructions from the king to the two ecclesiastics. With his mouth wide open, his eyes ready to start from their sockets, his face become as pale as death, and his limbs scarcely able to support him, the unfortunate Curé de Guadrioul stood gasping in the middle of the room, unable to utter a word. All eyes were fixed upon him, all brows were frowning upon him, and the only thing which could have roused him, if it had been possible for anything to rouse him at that moment, was the extraordinary face which Jerome Riquet was making, in a vain endeavour to mingle in his countenance a certain proportion of compassion with contempt and reprobation. Nobody spoke for a moment or two after the governor had read the contents; but at length the Duc de Rouvré said, in a dry, severe tone,

"Secretary, you have made a note of this; you will keep also the fragment of paper. My lord the bishop, Messieurs Pelisson and St. Helie, after the painful and distressing event of this examination, I shall make no comment whatsoever upon what has taken place. I beg that you would remove this personage, the Curé de Guadrioul, from my house, to do with him as you think fit. You will not, of course, be surprised when you remember the threatening language which you three were pleased to use towards myself two days ago, in order to induce me to cause the arrest of the Count de Morseiul upon a charge of crimes of which he was not guilty—Monsieur Pelisson, do not interrupt me: I know you were more moderate than the rest; but, as you were acting together, I must look upon the words of one, your spokesman, to be the words of all—You will not be surprised, I say, recollecting these facts, that I send off a special messenger to his majesty this night, in order to give him my own statement of all these occurrences, and to beseech him to take those steps which

to me seem necessary for maintaining the peace and tranquillity of the province. I, gentlemen, do not encroach upon the rights and privileges of others; and, so long as his majesty is pleased to hold me in an official station, I will not suffer any one to trench upon my privileges and legitimate authority. As the hour for the daily meeting of the states is now fast approaching, however, I will bid you farewell, begging you to take this personage with you, and, as I have said, deal with him as you think fit, for I wish to exercise no severity upon any ecclesiastic."

The persons he addressed had nothing to say in reply, though the bishop thought fit to harangue the little party for a moment upon his own authority and high dignity, and Pelisson endeavoured to involve a bad business in a cloud of words. They were all, however, desperately mortified, and not a little alarmed; for there was no doubt that they had proceeded far beyond the point where their legitimate authority ended, in pressing the governor to severe measures against the Count de Morseiul. The loss of the packet, too, might now be attributed to themselves instead of to him; the delay in executing the king's will, as it had been expressed, would be laid to their charge; the Duc de Rouvré was evidently highly irritated against them, and his representations to the throne on the subject were likely to be listened to with peculiar attention, as they were coupled with the announcement to the king that the states, by his skilful management, had voted at once a much larger sum as a gift than any one at the court had anticipated. All these considerations alarmed the whole party, though indeed Pelisson, who had more knowledge of human nature than the other two, trusted, with some degree of hope, that the cloak of religious zeal would cover all other sins. His greatest apprehension proceeded from the supposition that the king would cast the blame of the loss of the packet on themselves, and would attribute the negligence which had caused it to want of respect to his person. He therefore set himself straightway to consider how such a result might be obviated. The bishop and the Abbé de St. Helie took an unceremonious leave of the governor and his friend, and pushing the culprit Curé of Guadrieul out before them, quitted the cabinet in haste. Pelisson paused for a moment to say a word or two more in order to

mitigate, as far as possible, the severity of the governor's report; but Monsieur de Rouvré was in no very placable mood, and the conference soon terminated, leaving the governor and the count to discuss the affair, half laughingly, half seriously.

The invitation of the Duc de Rouvré was now pressing and strong, that the young Count de Morseiul should remain at least two days longer at Poitiers, and he coupled that invitation with the direct intimation that it was most necessary he should do so, as he, the duke, had yet to learn in some degree the temper of the states in regard to the important questions between the Catholics and Protestants. The young count consequently agreed to remain; taking the precaution, however, of writing at full to Claude de l'Estang, and sending off the letter by one of his own trustworthy servants, beseeching him to draw up the petition which the Protestant gentry had agreed upon, and to have it ready by the time at which he proposed to arrive at Morseiul.

During the greater part of those two days which followed he saw little of Clémence de Marly. Without any cause assigned, she had been absent from all the spots where he was most likely to see her, except on those occasions when she was necessarily surrounded by a crowd. After breakfast she remained but a moment in the *salle*: on the first day she did not appear at dinner; and on the second she was absent from the breakfast-table. The Chevalier d'Evran was also absent, and everything tended to confirm, in the mind of the young Count de Morseiul, the impression which he had received that his friend was the lover of her whom he himself loved, and that some cause of disagreement, either temporary or permanent, had arisen between them. Nothing, however, tended to confirm this idea more than the appearance of Clémence herself when she was present. There was an anxiety in the expression of her eyes; a thoughtfulness about her brow; an impatience of society; an occasional absence of mind, which was hardly to be mistaken. Her whole appearance was that of a person struggling with strong feelings, which were, in reality, getting the mastery.

She showed no particular inclination after his return—except as we have seen on the first evening—to speak with the Count de Morseiul, either in public or in private. Words of civility passed between them, of

course, and every little courtesy was, perhaps, more scrupulously observed than usual with her; but on that evening which closed the last day of the young count's proposed stay, a change took place.

A large party had assembled at the governor's house; and though he himself looked both grave and anxious, he was doing the honours of his dwelling to every one with as much courtesy as possible, when suddenly, seeing the Count de Morseiul standing alone near the doorway of the second room, he crossed over to speak with him, saying, "Albert, Clémence was seeking for you a moment ago. Where is she? have you seen her?"

Ere the count could reply, Clémence de Marly herself came up, as if about to speak with the duke, whose hand she took in hers in the sort of daughter-like manner in which she always behaved to him.

"Monsieur de Morseiul," she said, with a thoughtful lustre shining in her eyes, and giving a deeper and brighter expression to her whole countenance, "I have come to take refuge with you from that young De Hericourt, who evidently intends to persecute me during the whole evening. But stay, stay, monseigneur," she added, turning to the duke, who seemed about to leave them to speak with some one else: "before you go, hear what I am going to say to Monsieur de Morseiul. You are going, count, I hear, to take your departure to-morrow morning early: if you would walk with me for half an hour in the gardens ere you leave us, you would much oblige me, as I wish to speak with you. Now, dear King of Poitou," she continued, turning to the duke, "you may go. I have no more secrets to make you a witness of."

The duke replied not exactly to her words, but seemed fully to comprehend them; and saying, "Not to-night, Clémence! remember, not to-night!" he left her under the charge of the Count de Morseiul, and proceeded to attend to his other guests.

Placed in a situation somewhat strange, and, as it were, forced to appear as one of the attendant train of the bright and beautiful girl, from whose dangerous fascinations he was eager to fly, for a single instant Albert of Morseiul felt slightly embarrassed; but unexpected situations seldom so much affected him as to produce anything like ungraceful hesitation of manner. Clémence de Marly might not, perhaps, even perceive that

the count was at all embarrassed, for she was deeply occupied with her own fancies; and though she conversed with him not gayly, but intelligently, there was evidently another train of thought going on in her breast all the time, which sometimes made her answer wide from the mark, and then smile at her own absence of mind.

The eyes of the young Marquis de Hericourt followed her wherever she turned, and certainly bore not the most placable expression towards the Count de Morseiul; but his anger or his watching disturbed neither Clémence nor her companion, who both had busy thoughts enough to occupy them. After some time the excitement of the dance seemed to rouse Clémence from her musing fit; and, though confined to subjects of ordinary interest, the conversation between her and the count became of a deeper tone and character, and her heart seemed to take part in it as well as her mind. Albert of Morseiul felt it far more dangerous than before; for though they might but speak of a picture, or a statue, or a song, with which he could have conversed with a connoisseur of any kind, perhaps, with more profit, as far as mere knowledge of the subject went, yet there was a refinement of taste evident in the manner in which Clémence viewed everything, a sparkling grace given by her imagination to every subject that she touched upon, when her feelings were really interested therein, which was very, very winning to a mind like that of Albert de Morseiul.

Is it possible, under such circumstances, always to be upon one's guard? Is it possible, when the heart loves deeply, always to conquer it with so powerful an effort as not to let it have the rule even for an hour? If it be, such was not the case with the young Count de Morseiul. He forgot not his resolutions, it is true; but he gave himself up to happiness for the moment, and spoke with warmth, enthusiasm, and eagerness, which can seldom, if ever, be displayed to a person we do not love. There was a light, too, in his eye when he gazed on Clémence de Marly—a look in which regret was mingled with tenderness, and in which the cloud of despair only shadowed, but did not darken, the fire of passion—which might well show her, unless her eyes were dazzled by their own light, that she was beloved, and loved

by a being of a higher and more energetic character than those which usually surrounded her.

Perhaps she did see it—perhaps she did not grieve to see it—for her eyes became subdued by his; her mellow and beautiful voice took a softer tone; the colour came and went in her cheek; and, before the end of the dance in which they were engaged, her whole appearance, her whole manner, made the count ask himself, “What am I doing?”

Clémence de Marly seemed to have addressed the same question to her own heart; for, as soon as the dance was over, the cloud of thoughtful sadness came back upon her brow, and she said, “I am fatigued. I shall dance no more to-night. All the people are doubtless come now, and dear Madame de Rouvré will move no more; so I shall go and set myself down in state beside her, and get her to shield me from annoyance to-night.”

The count led her towards the duchess, intending himself to seek his chamber soon after; but, as they went, Clémence said to him in a low tone, “Do you see that pretty girl sitting there by her mother, old Madame de Marville, so modest, and so gentle, and retiring? She is as good a little creature as ever breathed, and as pretty, yet nobody leads her out to dance. If I had a brother, I should like him to marry that girl. She would not bring him fortune, but she would bring him happiness. I wish, Monsieur de Morseuil, you would go and ask her to dance.”

Though he was anxious to retire and full of other thoughts, Albert of Morseuil would not have refused for the world; and Clémence, leading him up to her friend, said, “Annette, here is Monsieur le Comte de Morseuil wishes to dance with you; I am sure you will, for your friend’s sake.”

The young lady bowed her head with a slight, timid blush, and, rising, allowed the count to lead her to the dance.

No great opportunity of conversing existed; but Albert of Morseuil took especial pains to show himself as courteous and as kind as possible. Annette de Marville led the conversation herself to Clémence de Marly, and nothing could exceed the enthusiastic admiration with which she spoke of her friend. Perhaps a little to the surprise of the count, she never mentioned Clémence’s

beauty, or her grace, or her wit; matters which, in those days, and at the court of Louis XIV., were the only topics for praise, the only attractions coveted. She spoke of her high and noble feelings, her enthusiastic and affectionate heart; and, in answer to something which the count said not quite so laudatory as she would have it, she exclaimed,

"Oh! but Clémence does not do herself justice in the world. It is only to those who know her most intimately that her shy heart will show itself."

The words sunk into the mind of the Count de Morseiul; and when the dance was concluded, and he had led back his fair companion to her seat, he retired speedily to his own apartments, to meditate over what he had heard and what had taken place.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXPLANATIONS.

SILENT and lonely thought is a sad dispeller of enchantments. Under its power, the visions, and hopes, and indistinct dreams which had fluttered before the eyes of the Count de Morseiul during the magic moments he had passed with Clémence de Marly, fled like fairies at the approach of the sun, within a very short period after he had retired to his chamber; and all that remained was a sort of reproachful mournfulness when he thought over his own conduct and the indulgence of those feelings which he feared he had displayed but too plainly. With such thoughts he lay down to rest; but they were not soothing companions of the pillow, and it was long ere he slept. From time to time he heard the sound of music from the halls below; and in the intervals, when some open door gave a freer passage to the sound, gay laughing voices came merry on the ear, speaking cheerfulness, and happiness, and contentment, and ignorance of the cares, and sorrows, and anxieties of life.

"Alas!" thought the count, as he lay and listened, "alas! that such bright illusions should ever pass away

and that those should ever learn the touch of grief, and anguish, and despair, who are now laughing in the heedless merriment of youth, unconscious of danger or of sorrow. And yet, perhaps," he continued, "could we lay bare the hearts of those now seemingly so gay—could we examine what is their ordinary state, and what their feelings were even a few short moments before they entered those saloons,—we might find there also as much care and pain as in any other scene of life, and bless the glad merriment that lulls human pangs and anxieties for a time, though it cannot quench them altogether."

Though he went to sleep late, he rose early on the following morning, not forgetful of his appointment with Clémence de Marly. Fearful, however, that she might be in the gardens before him, he dressed himself and hastened out without the loss of a single minute, not a little anxious to know what was the nature of the communication which she had to make to him, and with which the Duc de Rouvré was evidently acquainted. He was, in truth, anxious in regard to every part of their conversation; he was anxious in regard to its result; but still he did not lay out at all the conduct he was to pursue towards her, feeling that he had awakened from the dream of the evening before, and was not likely to indulge in such visions again. There was nobody in the part of the garden near the house; and he walked on in the direction which she had pointed out to him till he had nearly reached the rampart, and thus satisfied himself that she had not yet arrived. He then turned back, and, before he had gone half way down, he beheld Clémence coming towards him, but at some distance.

She was certainly looking more lovely than ever; and he could not but feel that, even in her very gayest and most sparkling moods, there was a charm wanting in comparison with her more serious and thoughtful aspect. Clémence was now evidently a good deal agitated. It often happens, when we have an act of importance to perform, especially when that act is unusual to us, that, even in revolving it in our own minds and preparing for the moment, we overpower ourselves, as it were, by the force of our own thoughts, and, by guarding against agitation, give agitation the better opportunity to assail us.

Albert of Morseuil saw that Clémence was much

moved, and he prepared to sooth her by every means in his power; the only efficacious means being to draw her attention to ordinary things. "Let me offer you my arm," he said, in a kindly tone; and, leading her on, he spoke of the beauty of the morning, and then of Annette de Marville, and then of other indifferent things. Clémence seemed to understand his object; and though she at first smiled, as if to intimate that she did so, she gave her mind up to his guidance, and for five or ten minutes touched upon no subject but the ordinary topics of conversation. As they approached the rampart, however, and she had an opportunity of looking along it, and ascertaining that there was no one there, she said,

"Now I am better; now I can speak of other things. Monsieur de Morseiul," she continued, "although I am accustomed to do extraordinary things, and to behave, in many respects, unlike other people, I dare say you do not suppose that I would have taken the very bold step of asking any gentleman to meet me here, as I have done you this day, without a motive sufficient to justify me, even in your sight."

"I am quite sure of it," replied the count; "and though you may think me, perhaps, a harsh censor, I am not at all inclined to be so in your case."

"Indeed?" she said, with a somewhat mournful shake of the head; "indeed! But, however, Monsieur de Morseiul, what I have to tell you is substantial, real, and more important than any feelings or inclinations. I shall have to pain you, to grieve you, to call up apprehensions, to prepare you, perhaps, for suffering! Oh God!" she cried, bursting suddenly into tears, "that I should have to do this!"

The count took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and besought her to be calm and soothed. "Do not be apprehensive, do not be grieved," he said; "calm yourself, dear lady; calm yourself, Clémence! I am prepared for much sorrow; I am prepared for danger and anxiety. I have for some time seen nothing but clouds and storms in the future!"

"But not such as these," replied Clémence, "not such as these. But I will not keep you in suspense, for that is worse than all now. The task, though a painful one, has been of my own seeking. First, Monsieur de Morseiul, to speak of that which I know is dearest to your heart—your religious liberty is in danger—it is

more than in danger; it is at an end. The whole resolutions of the court are now made known, at least among the principal Catholics of France. The reformed church is to be swept away; there is no longer to be any but one religion tolerated throughout the kingdom; your temples are to be overthrown; your ministers to be forbidden, on pain of death, to worship God as their forefathers have done; the edict of Nantes is to be revoked entirely;" and, clasping her hands together, she gazed in his face, while she added in a low, tremulous, but distinct voice, "you are to be driven to the mass at the point of the pike; your children are to be taken from you to be educated in another faith!"

Till she uttered the last words, Albert de Morseiul had remained with his eyes bent upon the ground, though deep feelings of agitation were evident in every line of his fine countenance. But when she spoke of the Protestants being driven to mass at the point of the pike, and their children being taken from them to be educated in the Catholic religion, he threw back his head, gazing up to heaven with a look of firm determination, while his left hand, by a natural movement, fell upon the hilt of his sword.

Clémence de Marly, as he did so, gazed upon him earnestly through the tears that were still in her eyes, and then exclaimed, as she saw how terribly moved he was, "These are dreadful tidings for me to tell Monsieur de Morseiul; you must hate me, I am sure you must hate me!"

"Hate you?" exclaimed the count, clasping both her hands in his, while in that agitating moment—carried away by the strength of his own feelings, and by the tokens she displayed of deep interest in him and his—every barrier gave way before the passion of his heart. "Hate you! oh God! I love you but too well, too deeply; better, more deeply than you can ever know, or divine, or dream of!"

Clémence turned away her head with a face glowing like the rose; but she left her hands in his without an effort to withdraw them, though she exclaimed, "Say not so! say not so! Or, at least," she added, turning round once more towards him, "say not so till you have heard all; for I have much, much more to tell, more painful, more terrible still. Let me have one moment to recover;" and, withdrawing her hands, she placed

them over her eyes for an instant. After a very brief pause, she added, "Now, Monsieur de Morseiul, I can go on. You are here in great danger. You have been in great danger ever since you have been here; and it has only been the power and authority of the duke that has protected you. After your first intercourse with the governor, the bishop, and the two ecclesiastics, a party has been made in the town, in the states, and in the province against you, and, alas! against the good Duc de Rouvré too. Finding that they were likely to incur the anger of the king for something that had happened if they did not make good their own case against you, they have laboured, I may say, night and day, to counteract the measures of the duke with the states, so as to make him obnoxious to the king. They have pretended that you—while you were here before—held illegal meetings with Huguenots in the neighbourhood, in order to oppose and frustrate the measures of the king. They have got the intendant of the province upon their side, and they insisted to Monsieur de Rouvré on your being instantly arrested, they having proffered distinct information of your having held a meeting with other Protestant noblemen, about three miles from this place, on the day of the hunting. Do you remember that day?"

"I shall never forget it!" replied the count, gazing upon her with a look that made her eyes sink again.

"Well," she continued, "Monsieur de Rouvré would not consent; and when the intendant threatened to arrest you on his own responsibility, the governor was obliged to say that he would defend you, and protect you, if necessary, by the interposition of the military force at his command. This created a complete breach, which is now apparently healed. Both parties have applied to the king, and Monsieur de Rouvré entertained the strongest hopes till yesterday that the decision would have been in his favour, both inasmuch as justice was on his side, and as he had obtained from the states a large supply, which he knew would be most gratifying and acceptable to the court; but suddenly, yesterday morning, news arrived of the general measures which the council intended to pursue. These I have already told you, and they showed the duke that everything would give way to bigotry and superstition. Various letters communicated the same intelligence to others as well as to the duke, but I having—"

She paused and hesitated, while the colour came and went rapidly in her cheek. "Speak, dear lady, speak," said the count, eagerly.

"I believe I may speak," she said, "after something that you said but now. I was going to say that, I having before taken upon me, perhaps sillily, when first these men brought their false charge against you, to meddle with this business, from feelings that I must not and cannot explain, and having then made the duke tell me the whole business by earnest prayers and entreaties—that he, seeing that I was—that I was interested in the matter, told me all the rest, and gave me permission to tell you the whole this morning, in order that you may guard against the measures that he fears are coming; 'I mustn't tell him myself,' he said; 'and, as the business has been communicated alone to Catholics, he is not likely to hear it till too late. Nevertheless, it is no secret, the matter having been told openly to at least twenty people in this town. You can therefore do it yourself, Clémence, that he may not say I have lured him back here into the jaws of his enemies.' Thus, then, Monsieur de Morseiul," she continued, more collectedly, "thus it is that I have acted as I have acted; and oh, if you would take my advice, painful as I acknowledge it is to give it, you would proceed instantly to Morseiul, and then either fly to England or to some other country where you will be in safety."

"How shall I thank you!" replied Albert of Morseiul, taking her hand, and casting behind him all consideration of his own fate and that of his fellow Protestants, to be thought of at an after moment, while, for the time, he gave his whole attention to the words which he had himself just spoken with regard to his love for Clémence de Marly. "How shall I ever thank you for the interest you have taken in me, for your kindness, for your generous kindness, and for all the pain that this I see has caused you! Pray, Clémence, pray add one more boon to those you have conferred; forgive the rash and presumptuous words I spoke just now, and forget them also."

"Forget them!" exclaimed Clémence, clasping her hands and raising her bright eyes to his. "Forget them! Never, as long as I have being! Forgive them, Monsieur de Morseiul; that were easily done if I could believe them true."

"They are as true as Heaven," replied the count; "but oh, Clémence, Clémence, lead me not away into false dreams! lead me not away to think that possible which is impossible. Can it, ought it to be?"

"I know not what you mean," replied Clémence, with a look somewhat bewildered, somewhat hurt. "All I know is, Monsieur de Morseiul, that you have spoken words which justify me to myself for feelings—ay, and perhaps for actions—in regard to which I was doubtful, fearful; which sometimes made me blush when I thought of them. The words that you have spoken take away that blush. I feel that I had not mistaken you; but yet," she added, "tell me, before you go, for I feel that it must be soon. What is it that you mean? What is the import of your question?"

"Oh, it means much and many things, Clémence," replied the count: "it takes in a wide range of painful feelings; and when I acknowledge, and again and again say that the words I have spoken are as true as Heaven; when, again and again, I say that I love you deeply, devotedly, entirely, better than aught else on earth, I grieve that I have said them, I feel that I have done wrong."

Clémence de Marly withdrew her hand, not sharply, not coldly, but mournfully, and she raised her fair countenance towards the sky as if asking, with apprehension at her heart, "What is thy will, oh Heaven!" "Albert of Morseiul," she said, "if you have any cause to regret that those words have been spoken, let them be for ever between us as if unspoken. They shall never by me be repeated to any one. You may perhaps one day, years hence"—and, as she spoke, her eyes filled with tears—"you may perhaps regret what you are now doing; but it will be a consolation to you then to know, that even though you spoke words of love and then recalled them, they were ever, as they ever shall be, a consolation and a comfort to me. The only thing on earth that I could fear was the blame of my own heart for having thought you loved me, and perhaps loved," she added, while a deep blush again spread over all her countenance, "and perhaps loved when you did not. You have shielded me from that blame: you have taken away all self-reproach; and now God speed you, Albert! Choose your own path, follow the dictates of your own heart and your own conscience, and farewell!"

"Stay, stay, Clémence," said the Count de Morseiul detaining her by the hand. "Yet listen to me; yet hear me a few words farther!"

She turned round upon him with one of her former smiles. "You know how easily such requests are granted," she said; "you know how willingly I would fain believe you all that is noble, and just, and honourable, and perfectly incapable of trifling with a woman's heart."

"First, then," said the count, "let me assure you that the words I have spoken were not, as you seemed to have imagined, for your ear alone, to be disavowed before the world. Ever shall I be ready, willing, eager to avow those words; and the love I feel, and have spoken of, will never, can never die away in my heart. But oh, Clémence, do you remember the words that passed between us in this very garden as to whether a woman could love twice? Do you remember what you acknowledged yourself on that occasion?"

"And do you believe, then," said Clémence, "after all that you have seen, that I have ever loved? Do you believe," she said, with the bright but scornful smile that sometimes crossed her lip, "that because Clémence de Marly has suffered herself to be surrounded by fools and coxcombs, the one to neutralize and oppose the other—whereas, if she had not done so, she must have chosen one from the herd to be her lord and master, and have become his slave—do you imagine, I say, that she has fallen in love with pretty Monsieur de Hericourt, with his hair frizzled like a piece of pastry, his wit as keen as a baby's wooden sword, and his courage of that high discriminating quality which might be led on by a child's trumpet? Or with the German prince, who, though a brave man and not without sense, is as courteous as an Italian mountebank's dancing bear, who thinks himself the pink of politeness when he hands round a hat to gather the sous, growling between his teeth all the time that he does so? Or with the Duc de Melcourt, who, though polished, and keen, and brave as his sword, is as cold-hearted as the iron that lies within that scabbard, and, in seeking Clémence de Marly, seeks three requisite things to accomplish a French nobleman's household: a large fortune, which may pay cooks and serving-men, and give at least two gilded coaches more; a handsome wife, that cares no-

thing for her husband, and is not likely to disturb him by her love; and some influence at court, which may obtain for him the next blue riband vacant! Out upon them all!" she added, vehemently; "and fy, fy, fy upon you, Albert of Morseiul! If I thought that you could love a person of whom you judged so meanly, I should believe you unworthy of another thought from me."

It is useless to deny that every word she spoke was pleasant to the ear of the Count de Morseiul; but yet she had not exactly touched the point towards which his own apprehensions regarding her had turned, and though he did not choose to name the chevalier, he still went on.

"I have thought nothing of the kind you speak of, Clémence," he replied; "but I may have thought it possible for you to have met with another more worthy of your thoughts and of your affections than any of these; that you may have loved him; and that, on some quarrel, either temporary or permanent, your indignation towards him, and your determination not to let him see the pain he has occasioned, may have made you fancy yourself in love with another. May not this be the case? But still, even were it not so, there is much—But I ask," he added, seeing the colour of Clémence fluttering like the changing colours on the plumage of a bird, "but I ask again, may it not have been so?"

Clémence gazed at him intently and steadfastly for a moment, and there was evidently a struggle going on in her breast of some kind. Perhaps Albert of Morseiul might misunderstand the nature of that struggle; indeed, it is clear he did so in some degree, for it certainly confirmed him in the apprehensions which he had entertained. The air and the expression of Clémence varied considerably while she gazed upon him. For a moment there was the air of proud beauty and careless caprice with which she treated the lovers of whom she had just spoken so lightly; and the next, as some memory seemed to cross her mind, the haughty look died away into one of subdued tenderness and affection. An instant after, sadness and sorrow came over her face like a cloud, and her eyes appeared to be filling with irrepressible tears. She conquered that, too; and when she replied, it was with a smile so strangely mingled with various expressions, that it was difficult to discern which predominated. There was a certain degree of

pride in her tone; there was sorrow upon her brow; and yet there was a playfulness round her eyes and lips, as if something made her happy amid it all.

"Such might be the case," she replied; "such is very likely to be the case with all women. But pray, sir—having settled it all so well and so wisely—who was the favoured person who had thus won Clémence de Marly's love, while some few others were seeking it in vain? Your falcon, Fancy, was certainly not without a lure. I see it clearly, Monsieur de Morseiul."

"It might be one," replied the count, "whose rival I would never become, even were other things done away; it might be one long and deeply regarded by myself."

"The chevalier, the chevalier!" exclaimed Clémence, with her whole face brightening into a merry smile. "No, no, no! You have been deceiving yourself. No, no, count; the Chevalier d'Evrans never has been, never will be, anything to me but that which he is now; we have had no quarrel, we have had no coldness. It is quite possible, Monsieur de Morseiul, believe me, even for a weak woman like myself, to feel friendship and place confidence without love."

She strove in some degree to withdraw the hand that the count had taken, as if she were about to leave him; but the count detained it, gently saying, "Stay yet one moment, Clémence; let us yet have but one word more of explanation before we part."

"No," she replied, disengaging her hand, "no; we have had explanations enough. Never wed a woman of whom you have a single doubt, sir. No, no," she added, with a look slightly triumphant perhaps, somewhat sorrowful, but somewhat playful withal; "no, no! Clémence de Marly has, perhaps, said somewhat too much already! But one thing I will tell you, Albert of Morseiul—you love her! She sees it, she knows it, and from henceforth she will not doubt it; for a woman does not trust by halves like a man. You love her! You will love her! and, though you have perhaps somewhat humiliated her; though you have made the proud humble and the gay melancholy, it is, perhaps, no bad lesson for her, and she will now make you sue, before you gain as a previous lover that which you now seem to require some pressing to accept. Adieu, Monsieur de Morseiul; there is, I see, somebody coming; adieu,"

"Stay yet a moment, Clémence; hear me yet urge something in my defence," exclaimed her lover. But Clémence proceeded down the steps from the rampart, only pausing and turning to say in a tone of greater tenderness and interest,

"Farewell, Albert, farewell; and, for God's sake, forget not the warning that I gave you this morning, nor any of the matters so much more worthy of attention than the worthless love of a gay capricious girl."

Thus saying, she hastened on, and passing by the person who was coming forward from the house—and who was merely a servant attached to the Count de Morseiul, as usual hunting out his master to interrupt him at the most inappropriate time—she hurried to a small door to the left of the building, entered, and mounting a back staircase which led towards her own apartments, she sought shelter therein from all the many eyes that were at that time beginning to move about the place; for her face was a tablet on which strong and recent emotion was deeply and legibly written.

Nor had that emotion passed, indeed; but, on the contrary, new and agitating thoughts had been swelling upon her all the way through the gardens as she returned alone—the memories of one of those short but important lapses of time which change with the power of an enchanter the whole course of our being; which alter feeling and thoughts, and hope and expectation; give a different direction to aspiration, and effort, and ambition; which add wings and a fiery sword to enthusiasm, and, in fact, turn the thread of destiny upon a new track through the labyrinth of life.

There was in the midst of those memories one bright and beautiful spot; but it was mingled with so many contending feelings—there was so much alloy to that pure gold—that, when at length she reached her dressing-room and cast herself into a chair, she became completely overpowered, and, bursting into tears, wept bitterly and long.

The old and faithful attendant whom Albert of Morseiul had seen with her in the forest, and who was, indeed, far superior to the station which she filled, both by talents, education, and heart, now witnessing the emotion of her young mistress, glided up and took her hand in hers, trying by every quiet attention to tranquillize and sooth her. It was in vain, for a long time,

however, that she did so ; and when at length Clémence had recovered in some degree her composure, and began to dry her eyes, the attendant asked, eagerly, "Dear, dear child, what is it has grieved you so ?"

"I will tell you, Maria ; I will tell you in a minute," replied Clémence. "You who have been a sharer of all my thoughts from my infancy ; you who were given me as a friend by the dear mother I have lost ; you who have preserved for me so much, and have preserved me myself so often, I will tell you all and everything, I will have no concealment in this from you ; for I feel, as if I were a prophet, that terrible and troublous times are coming : that it is my fate to take a deep and painful part therein ; and that I shall need one like you to counsel, and advise, and assist, and support me in many a danger, and, for aught I know, in many a calamity."

"Dear Clémence, dear child," said the attendant, "I will ever do my best to sooth and comfort you ; and what little assistance I can give shall be given ; but I have trusted and I have hoped for many days—now both from what I have seen and what I have heard—that there was a stronger hand than that of a weak old woman about to be plighted to support and defend you for life."

"Who do you mean ?" exclaimed Clémence, eagerly ; "who are you speaking of, Maria ?"

"Can you not divine ?" demanded the old lady ; "can you not divine that I mean him that we saw in the forest ; him who seemed to my old eyes to wed you then, with the ring that your mother gave you, when she told you never to part with it to any one but to the man who was to place it again on your finger as your husband."

"Good Heaven !" exclaimed Clémence, "I never thought of that ! I am his wife, then, Maria ; at least I shall ever consider myself such."

"But will he consider you so too ?" demanded the attendant ; "and do you love him enough to consider him so, dear child ? I have never seen you love any one yet, and I only began to hope that you would love him when I saw your colour change as often as his name was mentioned."

"I have said I would tell you all, Maria," replied Clémence, "and I will tell you all. I never have loved any one before ; and how could I, surrounded as I have

been by the empty, and the vain, and the vicious; by a crowd so full of vices and so barren of virtues, that a man thought himself superior to the whole world if he had but one good quality to recommend him; and what were the qualities on which they piqued themselves? If a man had wit, he thought himself a match for an empress; if he had courage, though that, to say the truth, was the most general quality, he felt himself privileged to be a libertine, and a gamester, and an atheist; and, instead of feeling shame, he gloried in his faults. How could I love any of such men? How could I esteem them—the first step to love? I have but heard one instance of true affection in the court of France—that of poor Conti to the king's daughter; and I never fancied myself such a paragon as to be the second woman that could raise such attachment. Nothing less, however, would satisfy me, and therefore I determined to shape my course accordingly. I resolved to let the crowd that chose it follow, and flatter, and affect to worship as much as ever they so pleased. It was their doing, not mine. I mean not to say that it did not please and amuse me: I mean not to say that I did not feel some sort of satisfaction—which I now see was wrong to feel—in using as slaves, in ordering here and there, in trampling upon and mortifying a set of beings that I contemned and despised, and that valued me alone for gifts which I valued not myself. Had there been one man among them that at all deserved me; that gave one thought to my mind or to my heart, rather than to my beauty or my fortune, he would have hated me for the manner in which I treated him and others; and I might have learned to love him, even while he learned to condemn me. Such was not the case, however, for there was not one that did so. Had I declared my determination of never marrying, to be the slave of a being I despised, they would soon have put me in a convent, or, at least, have tried to do so; and I feared they might. Therefore it was I went on upon the same plan, sitting like a waxen virgin in a shrine, letting adorers come and worship as much as they pleased, and taking notice of none. There is not one of them that can say that I ever gave him aught but a cutting speech or an expression of my contempt. It is now several years ago, but you must remember it well, when we were first with the duke at Ruffigny."

"Oh, I remember it well," replied the attendant, "and the hunting; and your laying down the bridle like a wild, careless girl, as you then were, and the horse running away with you, and this very Count de Morseiul saving you by stopping it. Ay, I remember it all well, and you told me how gallant and handsome he looked, and all he had said; and I laughed, and told you you were in love with him."

"I was not in love," replied Clémence, with the colour slightly deepening in her cheek, "I was not in love; but I might soon have been so even then. I thought a great deal about him; I was very young, had mixed not at all with the world, and he was certainly, at that time, in personal appearance what might well realize the dream of a young and enthusiastic imagination. He is older and graver now," she added, musing, "and time has made a change on him; but yet I scarcely think he is less handsome. However, I thought of him a good deal then, especially after I had met him the second time, and discovered who he was: and I thought of him often afterward. Wherever there was any gallant action done, I was sure to listen eagerly, expecting to hear his name. And how often did I hear it, Maria! Not a campaign passed but some new praises fell upon the Count de Morseiul. He had defended this post, like some ancient hero, against whole legions of the enemy. He had thrown himself into that small fort, which was considered untenable, and held an army at bay for weeks. He had been the first to plant his foot on the breach; he had been the last in the rear upon a retreat. The peasant's cottage, the citizen's fireside, owed their safety to him; and the ministers of another religion than his own had found shelter and protection beneath his sword. I know not how it was, but when all these tales were told me, his image always rose up before me as I had seen him, and I pictured him in every action. I could see him leading the charging squadrons. I could see him standing in the deadly breach. I could see the women and the children, and the conquered and the wounded, clinging to his knees, and could see him saving them. I did not love him, Maria, but I thought of him a great deal more than of any one else in all the world. Well, then, after some years came the last great service that he rendered us, not many weeks ago, and was not his demeanour then, Maria; was not his whole

air and conduct in the midst of danger to himself and others; the peremptory demand of our liberation; the restoration of the ring I valued; the easy, unshaken courtesy in a moment of agitation and risk; was it not all noble, all chivalrous, all such as a woman's imagination might well dwell upon?"

"It was, indeed," replied Maria; "and ever since then I have thought that you loved him."

"In the mean time," continued Clémence, "in the mean time I had also become sadly spoiled. I had grown capricious, and vain, and haughty, by indulging such feelings for several years in pursuit of my own system; and when the count appeared at Poitiers, I do not know that I was inclined to treat him well. Not that I would ever have behaved to him as I did to others; but I scarcely knew how to behave better. I believed myself privileged to say and do anything I thought right, to exact anything, nay, to command anything. I was surprised when I found he took no notice of me; I was mortified, perhaps; I determined, if ever I made him happy at last, to punish him for his first indifference; to punish him, how think you? To make him love me, to make him doubtful of whether I loved him, and to make him figure in the train of those whom I myself despised. But, oh, Maria, I soon found that I could not accomplish what I sought. There was a power, a command in his nature that overawed, that commanded me. Instead of teaching him to love me, and making him learn to doubt that I loved him, I soon found that it was I that loved, and learned to doubt that he loved me. Then came restlessness and disquietude. From time to time I saw, I felt that he loved me, and then again I doubted, and strove to make him show it more clearly by the very means best calculated to make him crush it altogether. I affected to listen to the frivolous and the vain, to smile upon the beings I despised, to assume indifference towards the only one I loved. Thus it went on till the last day of his stay, when he refused to accompany us on our hunting-party, but left me with a promise to join us if he could. I was disappointed, mortified. I doubted if he would keep his promise. I doubted whether he had any inclination to do so, and I strove to forget, in the excitement of the chase, the bitterness of that which I suffered. Suddenly, however, I caught a glance of him riding down to

wards us. He came up to my side, he rode on by me, he attended to me, he spoke to me alone ; there was a grace, and a dignity, and a glory about his person that was new and strange ; he seemed as if some new inspiration had come upon him. On every subject that we spoke of he poured forth his soul in words of fire. His eyes and his countenance beamed with living light, such as I had never before beheld ; everything vanished from my eyes and thoughts but him ; everything seemed small and insignificant, and to bow before him ; the very fiery charger that he rode seemed to obey, with scarcely a sign or indication of his will. The cavaliers around looked but like his attendants, and I—I, Maria—proud, and haughty, and vain as I had encouraged myself to be—I felt that I was in the presence of my master, and that there, beside me, was the only man on earth that I could willingly and implicitly obey ; I felt subdued, but not depressed ; I felt, perhaps, as a woman ought to feel towards a man she loves ; that I was competent to be his companion and his friend ; to share his thoughts ; to respond to all his feelings ; to enter into his views and opinions ; to meet him, in short, with a mind yielding, but scarcely to be called inferior ; different in quality, but harmonious in love and thought. I felt that he was one who would never wish me to be a slave ; but one that I should be prompt and ready to bend to and obey. Can I tell you, Maria, all the agony that took possession of my heart when I found that the whole bright scene was to pass away like a dream ! Since then, many a painful thing has happened. I have wrung my heart, I have embittered my repose by fancying that I have loved where I was not loved in return ; that I have been the person to seek, and he to despise me. But this day, this day, Maria, has come an explanation. He has told me that he loves me, he has told me that he has loved me long ; he has taken away that shame, he has given me that comfort. We both foresee many difficulties, pangs, and anxieties ; but, alas ! Maria, I see plainly not only that he discovers in the future far more difficulties, and dangers, and obstacles between us than I myself perceive, but also that he disapproves of much of my conduct ; that doubts and apprehensions mingle with his love ; that it is a thing which he has striven against, not from his apprehension of difficulties, but from his doubts of me and of my nature ; that love has

mastered him for a time, but, still, has not subdued him altogether. It is a bitter and sad thing," she added, placing her hands over her eyes.

"But, dear child," said the attendant, "it will be easy for you to remove all such doubts and apprehensions."

"Hush, hush," replied Clémence; "let me finish, Maria, and then say no more upon this score to-day. I will hear all you can say to-morrow. He is gone by this time; God knows whether we shall ever meet again. But, at all events, my conduct is determined; I will act in every respect, whether he be with me or whether he be absent from me; whether he misunderstands me or whether he conceives my motives exactly; I will act as I know he would approve if he could see every action and every movement of my heart. I will cast behind me all those things which I now feel were wrong; though, Heaven knows, I did not see that there was the slightest evil in any of them, till love for him has, with the quickness of a flash of lightning, opened my eyes in regard to my conduct towards others. I will do all, in short, that he ought to love me for; and, in doing that, I will in no degree seek him, but leave fate and God's will to work out my destiny, trusting that with such purposes I shall be less miserable than I have been for the last week. And now, Maria," she added, "I have given you the picture of a woman's heart. Let us dwell no more upon this theme, for I must wash away these tears, these new invaders of eyes that have seldom known them before, and go as soon as possible to Monsieur de Rouvré, to inform him of a part, at least, of my conversation with the count."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

SOMETIMES, amid the storms and tempests of life, when the rain of sorrow has been pouring down amain, and the lightning of wrath been flashing on our path, the clouds overhead heavy and loaded with mischief to

come, and the thunder rolling round and round after the flash, there will come a brief calm moment of sweet tranquillity, as if wrath and enmity, and strife and care, and misfortune, had cast themselves down to rest exhausted with their fury. Happy is the man who in such moments can throw from him remembrance of the past and apprehension of the future, and taste the refreshing power without alloy. But seldom can we do so: the passed-by storm is fresh on memory, the threatening aspect of the sky is full before our eyes, and such was the case with Albert of Morseiul as, on the third day after leaving Poitiers, he rode on towards his own abode.

The degree of impatient anxiety under which he had laboured had caused him to make the first two days' journeys as long as possible, so that not above ten or twelve miles, or, at most, fifteen, lay between him and his own chateau when he set out on that third morning from the inn.

Nothing occurred to disturb his journey; everything passed in peace and tranquillity; known, loved, and respected in that part of the country, the people vied with each other as to which should show him the most affectionate civility, and no news either from the capital or Poitiers had reached him to dissipate the apparent calm around. Everything wore the aspect of peace throughout the country. The peasant's wife sunned herself at the door of her cottage, with distaff and spindle in hand, plying lightly her daily toil, while her children ran or crawled about before her, full of enjoyment themselves, and giving enjoyment to her who beheld them. The peasant pursued his labour in the fields, and cheered it by a song; and although the count knew many of those whom he saw to be Protestants, there was no appearance of anxiety or apprehension among them. Everything was cheerful, and contented, and tranquil, and the peace of the scene sank into his heart. Angels may be supposed to look upon this earth's pleasures with a feeling of melancholy, though not sadness, from a knowledge of their fragility; and so Albert of Morseiul, though he felt in some degree calmed and tranquillized by what he saw, yet could not prevent a sensation of deep melancholy from mingling with his other feelings as he thought, "This can but last for a very, very little time."

At length he turned into the very wood where he had

encountered the robbers, which now bore, of course, a very different aspect in the full daylight from that which it had borne in the depth of the night. The summer sunshine was now streaming through the green leaves, and far away between the wide bolls of the trees the mossy ground might be seen carpeted with velvet softness, and checkered with bright catches and streams of light. The road, too, though not in the full sunshine, was crossed here and there by long lines of radiance, and the sky overhead was seen clear and blue, while every projecting branch of the tall trees above caught the light, and sparkled with a brighter green.

The aspect of this scene was more tranquillizing still than the last; but it did not chase the count's deep melancholy; and, finding that he was riding very slow, which only afforded time for thought when thought was useless, he turned round to see if his attendants were near, intending to ride on faster if they were within sight. The road was very nearly straight; and at the distance of four or five hundred yards, passing one of the soft green refreshing shadows cast by the wood, he saw the body of servants riding gayly on after him, conversing together. Between him and them, however, just issuing from one of the green woodpaths which joined the high road, was another figure, which immediately called the count's attention. It was that of an old man, plain and simple in his own appearance, but mounted on a mule gayly tricked and caparisoned, as was the universal custom in those days, with fringes and knobs of red worsted, and bells of many a size and shape about its collar and headstall. The rider was not one of those *whom* men forget easily; and, though he was at a considerable distance as well as the attendants, the count instantly recognised good Claude de l'Estang.

Seeing the count pause, the old man put his mule into a quicker pace and rode on towards him. When he came near he wished his young friend joy of his return, but his own face was anything but joyful.

"We shall all be indeed glad to see you, my dear Albert," he said, "for we have very great need of your return on every account. Besides all these grievous and iniquitous proceedings against the Protestants, we have in our own bosom men who, I hear, had the impudence even to attack you, but who have since commit-

ted various other outrages of a marked and peculiar character. One man, I learn, has been shot dead upon the spot; another has been wounded severely; a third has been robbed and maltreated. But I cannot discover that any one has met with harshness, except such as are distinguished for a somewhat inordinate zeal in favour of the Catholic faith. Not a Protestant has been attacked, which marks the matter more particularly, and the peasantry themselves are beginning to notice the fact, so that it will not be long before their priests take notice of it, and the eyes of the state will be turned angrily upon us."

"I fear, indeed, that it will be so," replied the count; "but whether the result will or will not be evil, God in his wisdom only knows."

"How is this, my dear Albert?" exclaimed the clergyman. "You sent to me to ask that I should draw up a humble petition to the king, representing the Protestants as peaceful, humble, obedient subjects, and surely we must take every measure that we may not, by our own actions, give the lie to our own words."

"I will certainly, my dear friend," replied the count, "take every measure that it is possible for man to take to put down this evil system of plunder and violence, whether it be carried on by Protestants or Catholics. There is a notorious violation of the law, and I am determined to put it down, if it be possible, without any regard whatsoever to distinction between the two religions. The petition to the king was necessary when I wrote about it, and is so still, for it was then our only hope, and it may now be taken as a proof that even to the last moment we were willing to show ourselves humble, devoted, and loyal. I expect nothing from it but that result; but that result itself is something."

"I fear, my son," said the old man, "that you have heard bad news since you wrote to me."

"The worst," replied the count, with a melancholy shake of the head, "the very worst that can be given. They intend, I understand from authority that cannot be doubted, to suppress entirely the free exercise of our religion in France, and to revoke the edict of our good King Henry which secured it to us."

The old man dropped the reins upon his mule's neck, and raised his eyes appealingly to heaven. "Terrible, indeed!" he said; "but I can scarcely credit it."

"It is but too true, but too certain!" replied the count; "and yet, terrible as this is; horrible, infamous, detestable as is the cruelty and tyranny of the act itself, the means by which it is to be carried into execution are still more cruel, tyrannical, and detestable."

The old man gazed in his face as if he had hardly voice to demand what those means were; but, after a brief pause, the count went on: "To sum up all in one word, they intend to take the Protestant children from the Protestant mother, from the father, from the brother, and, forbidding all intercourse, to place them in the hands of the enemies of our faith, to be educated in the superstitions that we abhor."

"God will avert it!" said the old man; "it cannot be that even the sins and the follies of him who now sits upon the throne of France should deserve the signal punishment of being thus utterly given up and abandoned by the spirit of God to the tyrannical and brutal foolishness of his own heart. I cannot believe that it will ever be executed. I cannot believe that it will ever be attempted. I doubt not they will go on as they have begun; that they will send smooth-faced priests with cunning devices, as they have done indeed since you went hence, to bribe and buy to the domination of Satan the weak and wavering of our flocks, and send lists of them to the king, to swell his heart with the pride of having made converts. I can easily conceive that they will be permitted to take from us places and dignities, to drive us by every sort of annoyance, so that the gold may be purified from the dross, the corn may be winnowed from the chaff. All this they will do, for all this undoubtedly we sinners have deserved. But I do not believe that they will be permitted to do more, and my trust is not in man, but in God. For the sins that we have committed, for the weakness we have displayed, for murmurs and rebellion against his will, for sinful doubts and apprehensions of his mercy, from the earthliness of our thoughts, and the want of purity in all our dealings, God may permit us to be smitten severely, terribly; but the fiery sword of his vengeance will not go out against his people beyond a certain point. He has built his church upon a rock, and there shall it stand; nor will I ever believe that the reformed church of France shall be extinguished in the land, nor that the people who have sought God with sincerity shall be

left desolate. We will trust in him, my son! We will trust in him!"

"Ay," said the count; "but, my excellent old friend, it now becomes our duty to think seriously what means, under God's will, we may use in defence of his church. I myself have thought upon it long and eagerly, but I have thought of it in vain, for the subject is so difficult and so embarrassed, that, without some one to counsel me, some one to aid me, I can fix upon no plan that offers even a probability of success. I must speak with you before to-morrow be over, long and earnestly. I know not why I should not turn to your dwelling with you even now," he added; "I know not when I may be taken away from the midst of you, for much personal danger threatens myself. But, however, what I have to say must be said alone and in private. The man Riquet is behind, and, though I believe he is faithful to me, and holds but loosely by his popish creed, I must not trust too far. Let us turn towards your dwelling."

"Be it so, be it so," replied the old man; and wending on their way through the forest for some distance farther, they took the first road that turned to the right, and pursued the forest path that ran along through the bottom of the deep valleys, in which some part of the wood was scattered.

It had been a bright and a beautiful day, but the air was warm and sultry; and the horses of the count looked more fatigued than might have been expected from so short a journey. The old clergyman and his young friend spoke but little more as they went along; and it was only to comment upon the tired condition of the horses, and the oppressive state of the atmosphere that they did so.

"It is as well, my son," said Claude de l'Estang, at length, "it is as well that you have turned with me, for, depend upon it, we shall have a storm. Do you not see those large harsh masses of cloud rising above the trees?"

"I have remarked them some time," replied the count, "and twice I thought I saw a flash."

"Hark!" exclaimed the clergyman, and there was evidently a sound of thunder not very distant. "Let us ride a little quicker," the old man continued; "we are just coming to the slope of the hill where the wood ends, and then we are not far from Auron."

The count did as the pastor asked him ; and the moment after they issued out from the wood, upon the shoulder of a gentle eminence, with green slopes declining from either side of the road into the valleys. A tall hill rose gradually to the left, along the side of which the highway was cut; and full in their view to the right—but two or three miles on, across the valley, left by the eminence along which they rode—appeared the high conical hill of Auron, crowned, as we have before described it, with the little village spire.

Though there were some detached masses of cloud sweeping over the sky above them, and twisting themselves into harsh, curious forms, the sun was still shining warm and strong upon the spot where they were, while the storm, the voice of which they had heard in the wood, was seen treading the valleys and hills beyond towards Auron, wrapped in a mantle of dark vapours and shadows. The contrast between the bright sunshine and sparkling light around them, and the sweeping thunder-clouds that were pouring forth their mingled wrath upon the beautiful country beyond, was very fine, and the count drew in his horse for a moment to gaze upon it more at ease.

"You see, though they have been busy in seducing my flock over there," said the pastor, fixing his eyes with a look of affection upon Auron, "you see they have still left me my spire to the church. I fear not from any good will to me or mine," he added, "but because they say it acts as a sort of landmark at sea."

The count made no reply, for he thought that the time was not far distant when that peaceful village would be the scene of persecution, if not of desolation, and the building where a quiet and industrious population had worshipped God for ages, according to the dictates of their own consciences, would be taken from them. His only answer then was a melancholy smile, as he rode slowly on again, still gazing on the village and the storm, the flashes of the lightning blazing across the path from time to time, as if the cloud from which they issued had been close above the travellers. Scarcely, however, had the count and his companion gone a hundred yards along the side of the hill, when a bright, fitful line of intense light darted across the curtain of the dark cloud before their eyes, aimed like a fiery javelin cast by the unerring hand of the destroying angel at the

pointed spire of the village church. The shape of the spire was instantly changed; a part evidently fell in ruins; the next moment, the whole of that which stood blazed forth in flames, like a fiery beacon raised on the highest hill of an invaded land to tell that strife and bloodshed have begun.

"It is accomplished!" cried the pastor, as he gazed upon the destruction of the spire. "It is accomplished! Oh, Albert, how natural is weakness and superstition to the human heart! Can we see the fall of that building, in which for many a long year our pure faith has offered up its prayers, unmingled with the vanities of a false creed, and not feel as if the will of God were against us; as if that were a sign unto us that his favour had passed from us, at least in this land; as if it were a warning for us to gird ourselves, and, shaking off the dust of our feet, to seek another place of abiding!"

He paused not while he spoke, however, but rode on quickly, in order to aid and direct in saving any part of the building that yet remained; but, as they went, he still continued to pour forth many a sorrowful ejaculation, mingling, with personal grief for the destruction of an object which had for long years been familiar with his eye, and associated with every feeling of home, and peace, and of happy dwelling among his own people, and of high duties well performed, vague feelings of awe, and, perhaps, of superstition, as he read in that sight a warning, and a sign, and a shadowing forth of the Almighty will, that the church whereof he was a member was destined to destruction also.

Before the party reached the village the spire had been completely consumed; but the peasantry had fortunately succeeded in preventing the fire from reaching the body of the building, and the rain was now pouring down in torrents, as the tears of an angel of wrath over the accomplishment of his painful mission; so that all that remained was to ascertain what damage had been done. Both the clergyman and the count remarked several strangers standing round the church, offering no assistance to any one, and only communing together occasionally in a low voice on the proceedings of the Protestant population. Albert of Morseiul gazed upon them with some surprise, and at length said, "I think, gentlemen, you might have given some little aid and assistance in this matter."

"What!" cried one of the men, "aid in upholding a temple of heretics! What, keep from the destruction with which God has marked it, a building which man should long ago have pulled down!"

"I did not know you, gentlemen," replied the count. "There are some circumstances in which people may be expected to remember that they are fellow-men and fellow-Christians, before they think of sects or denominations."

Thus saying, he turned and left them, accompanying Claude de l'Etang to his dwelling.

"Never mind them, Albert, never mind them," said the pastor, as they walked along. "These are the men who are engaged daily in seducing my flock. I have seen them more than once as I have been going hither and thither among the people; but I have heeded them not, nor ever spoken to them. Those who can sell themselves for gold—and gold is the means of persuasion that they are now adopting—are not steadfast or faithful in any religion, and are more likely to corrupt others, and to lead to great defection by falling away in a moment of need, than to serve or prop the cause to which they pretend to be attached. I trust that God's grace will reach them in time; but, in a moment of increasing danger like this, I would rather that they showed themselves at once. I would rather, if they are to sell themselves either for safety or for gold, that they should sell themselves at once, and let us know them before the fiery ordeal comes. I would rather have to say they went forth from us because they were not of us, than think them children of light, and find them children of darkness."

"I fear," said the count, in a low voice, "I fear that they are waging the war against us, my good friend, in a manner which will deprive us of all unanimity. It is no longer what it was in former times, when the persecuting sword was all we had to fear and to resist. We have now the artful tongues of oily and deceitful disputants. We have all the hellish cunning of a sect which allows every means to be admissible, every falsehood, every misstatement, every perversion, every deceit to be just, and right, and righteous, so that the object to be obtained is the promotion of their own creed. Thus the great mass of the weak or the ill-informed may be affected by their teachers; while, at the same time,

gold is held out to allure the covetous ; the deprivation of rank, station, office, and emolument is employed to drive the ambitious, and the slothful, and the indifferent ; and threats of greater severity of persecution, mental torture, insult, indignity, and even death itself, are held over the heads of the coward and the fearful."

They thus conversed as they went along, and the opinion of each but served to depress the hopes of the other more and more. Both were well acquainted with the spirit of doubt and disunion that reigned among the Protestants of France ; a spirit of disunion which had been planted, fostered, and encouraged by every art that a body of cunning and unscrupulous men could employ to weaken the power of their adversaries. On arriving at the house of Claude de l'Estang, the pastor put into the hands of his young friend the petition to the king which he had drawn up, and which, perfectly meeting his views, was immediately sent off for general signature, in order to be transmitted to Paris and presented to the monarch. Long before it reached him, however, the final and decisive blow had been struck, and, therefore, we shall notice that paper no more.

A long conversation ensued between the pastor and his young friend ; and it was evident to the Count de Morseiul that the opinions of Claude de l'Estang himself, stern and fervent as they had been in youth, now rendered milder by age, and, perhaps, by sorrow, tended directly to general and unquestioning submission rather than to resistance : not indeed to the abandonment of any religious principle, not to the slightest sacrifice of faith, not to the slightest conformity of what he deemed a false religion. No ; he proposed and he advised to suffer in patience for the creed that he held ; to see even the temples of the reformed church destroyed, if such an extreme should be adopted ; to see persons of the purer faith excluded from offices and dignity, and rank and emoluments ; even to suffer, should it be necessary, plunder, oppression, and imprisonment itself, without yielding one religious doctrine ; but, at the same time, without offering any resistance to the royal authority.

"But should they go still farther," said the count ; "should they attempt to interdict altogether the exercise of our religion ; should they take the child from the mother, the sister from the care of the brother ;

should they force upon us Roman rites, and demand from us confessions of papistical belief, what are we to do then, my good old friend !”

“ Our religious duties,” replied the pastor, “ we must not forbear to exercise, even if the sword hung over us that was to slay us at the first word. As for the rest, I trust and believe that it will not come to pass ; but if it should, there will be no choice left us but resistance or flight. Ask me not, Albert, to decide now upon which of the two we should choose. It must ever be a dark, a painful, and a terrible decision when the time comes that it is necessary to make it ; and perhaps the decision itself may be affected far more by the acts of others than by our own. We must determine according to circumstances ; but, in the mean time, let us, as far as possible, be prepared for either of the two painful alternatives. We must make great sacrifices, Albert, and I know that you are one of those who would ever be ready to make such for your fellow-Christians. If we are driven to flee from the land of our birth, and to seek a home in other countries ; if by the waters of Babylon we must sit down and weep, thinking of the Jerusalem that we shall never behold again, there will be many, very many of our brethren compelled to fly with but little means of support, and perhaps it may be long before in other lands they obtain such employment as will enable them to maintain themselves by the work of their own hands. Those who are richer must minister unto them, Albert. Luckily, I myself can do something in that sort ; for long ago, when there was no thought of this persecution, I sold what little land I had, intending to spend the amount in relieving any distress that I might see among my people, and to trust to the altar that I served for support in my old age. But little of this sum has been as yet expended, and if I did but know any hands in which I could trust it in a foreign land, either in England or in Holland, I would transmit it thither instantly. You too, Albert, if I have heard right, derived considerable wealth in money from some distant relation lately. For your own sake as well as others, it were better to place that in safety in foreign lands, for I find that it would be dangerous now to attempt to sell any landed possessions ; and, if you were forced to leave this country, you might find yourself suddenly reduced to want in the midst of strangers.”

"I have not only thought of this before," replied the count, "but I have already taken measures for transmitting that sum to Holland. As soon as I heard of the unjust prohibitions regarding the sale of lands by Protestants, I wrote to Holland to a banker whom I knew there in days of old, an honest man and a sincere friend, though somewhat too fond of gain. The sum I can thus transmit is far more than enough to give me competence for life; and, if you please, I can transmit thither the little store you speak of also."

"Willingly, willingly," replied the pastor; "it may be a benefit to others if not to me. Albert," he added, "I shall never quit this land! I feel it, I know it! My ministry must be accomplished here till the last: and whether I shall be taken from you by some of the ordinary events of nature, or whether God wills it that I should seal with my blood the defence of my faith and my testimony against the church of Rome, I know not; but I am sure, I feel sure, that I shall never quit the land in which I was born."

Albert of Morseiul did not attempt to argue with Claude de l'Estang upon this prejudice, for he knew it was one of those which, like some trees and shrubs, root themselves but the more firmly from being shaken, and from an ineffectual endeavour being made to pluck them out.

For nearly two hours the young count remained at the house of the clergyman, discussing all the various topics connected with their situation, while his servants were scattered about in different dwellings of the village. At the end of that time, however, Master Jerome Riquet made his appearance at the pastor's house, to inform his lord (from a participation in whose actions he judged he had been too long excluded) that the storm had passed away; and, ordering his horses to be brought up, after a few more words with Claude de l'Estang, the count mounted and pursued his way homeward to the chateau of Morseiul.

Throwing his rein to the groom, the young nobleman walked on through the vestibule and entered the great hall. It was calm and solitary, with the bright evening sunshine streaming through the tall windows and checkering the stone floor. Nothing was moving but a multitude of bright motes dancing in the sunbeam, and one of the banners of the house of Morseiul shaken

by the wind as the door opened and closed on the count's entrance. The whole aspect of the place told that it had not been tenanted for some time. Everything was beautifully clean indeed, but the tall-backed chairs ranged straight along the walls, the table standing exactly in the midst, the unsullied whiteness of the stone floor, not even marked with the print of a dog's foot, all spoke plainly that it had been long untenanted. The count gazed round it in silent melancholy, marked the waving banner and the dancing motes, and, if we may use the term, the solemn cheerfulness of that wide hall; and then said to himself, ere he turned again to leave it,

"Such will it be, and so the sun will shine, when I am gone afar—or in the grave."

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WE will now lead the reader into another and very different scene from any of those into which we have as yet conducted him. It is a small but cheerful sitting-room or parlour, in the house of a comfortable citizen of the town of Morseiul. There was everything that could be required for comfort, and a little for show. The corner cupboard, which protruded its round stomach into the room like that of some fat alderman of the olden time, was ornamented with a variety of little gewgaws and knickknacks of silver, displayed in quaint array upon the shelves; and, besides several brass lamps and sconces wonderfully well polished, which were never lighted, were a number of articles of porcelain, of a kind which was then somewhat rare, and is now nearly invaluable. The two windows of this little parlour looked out upon the great square or market-place, towards the southern corner of which it was situated, and commanded a view of a large blacksmith's forge on the opposite side, close by the gate leading down to what was called the Count's road. There was a door out of this parlour, a black oaken door, with panels richly

carved and ornamented, which appeared to lead into a room at the back, and another similar door at the side, opening into the passage, which went straight through the house from the square into the garden behind.

At the table in the midst of this room—which table, at the moment we speak of, that is, half past eight o'clock in the morning, was decorated with a large pewter dish, containing a savoury ragout of veal, flanked by two bottles of cider and four drinking cups—sat the burly person of good Paul Virlay, the rich blacksmith, who, being well to do in the world, and enabled by competence to take his ease, had not yet gone out to superintend the work which his men were carrying on at the forge opposite.

Another effect of his easy situation in life was, that he had time to perform those necessary ablutions too much required by the faces and hands of all blacksmiths, but which, alas! all blacksmiths are but too apt to neglect. It is true that, had he washed his face and hands for ever, or, after the prescribed rule of the Arabian Nights, had scoured them “forty times with alkali and forty times with the ashes of the same plant,” his face and hands would still have retained a certain glowing, coppery brown hue, which they had acquired by the action of sun, and air, and fire, and hard work, and which they likewise possessed, it must be confessed, in some degree from nature.

At the table with Paul Virlay were three other personages. The first was his daughter, a sweet little girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age, and the second his wife, a goodly dame, perhaps two or three years older than himself, and who, being terribly marked with the smallpox, had never possessed any beauty. Thus, at his marriage, Virlay, who had been in much request among the young ladies of Morseiul, declared that he had taken the good working horse instead of the jennet. She had always been extremely careful, laborious, active, and economical; somewhat given to smartness of apparel, indeed, but by no means to extravagance; and, though decorating herself with black velvet riband and large ornaments of gold, yet careful that the riband was not worn out too soon, and the gold ornaments neither bruised nor broken.

On her right hand, between herself and her husband, sat the fourth person of the party, who was no other than the lady's brother, a stout, broad-made, determined-

looking man, who had served long in the army under the count; and had risen as high, by his daring courage and somewhat rash gallantry, as any person not of noble blood could rise, except under very extraordinary circumstances. He had accumulated, it was said, a considerable sum of money—perhaps not by the most justifiable of all dealings with inhabitants of conquered districts—so that Armand Herval was an object of not a little attention, and what we may call cupidity, to the unmarried young ladies of Morseiul.

That town was not, indeed, his regular dwelling-place, for his abode was at a small town nearer to the sea-coast, some five or six miles off; but he frequently came to visit his sister and brother-in-law, over both of whom he exercised very considerable influence, although, as frequently is the case, the latter was naturally a man of much stronger natural sense than himself. It is in almost all instances, indeed, energy that gives power; and, with persons not well educated or not very highly endowed by nature, that energy loses none of its effect from approaching somewhat towards rashness. Such, then, was the case with Paul Virlay and his brother-in-law. When unmoved by any strong passions, however, Armand Herval was quite the man to lead and to seduce. He was gay, blithe, cheerful, full of frolic, fearless of consequences, specious in reasoning, possessing much jest and repartee, overflowing with tales or anecdotes of what he had seen, or heard, or done in the wars; and it was only when crossed, or opposed, or excited by wine or anger, that the darker and more fiery spirit of the somewhat ruthless trooper would break forth and overawe those that surrounded him.

On the present morning there was a strange mixture in his demeanour of a sad and serious thoughtfulness with gayety and even merriment. He laughed and jested with his niece; he took a pleasure in teasing his sister; but he spoke once or twice, in a low and bitter tone, to Paul Virlay upon various matters which were taking place in the neighbourhood, and did not even altogether spare the Count de Morseiul himself. At that, however, Virlay bristled up; and his brother-in-law, who had done it more from a spirit of teasing than aught else, only laughed at his anger, and turned the discourse to something else. He ate and drank abundantly of the breakfast set before him; laughed at the cleanness of

Virlay's face and hands, and the smartness of his brown jerkin, and insisted that his little niece should run to the window to see whether the men were working properly, saying that her father was no longer fit for his trade.

The girl did as she was bid, and replied immediately, "I do not see the men at all, but I see the young count just turning the corner."

"That is early," cried Virlay, laying down his fork. "Is he on horseback?"

"No, he is on foot," replied the girl, "and nobody with him. He is coming over here, I declare he is coming over here," cried the girl, clapping her hands.

"Nonsense," cried Virlay, starting up, as well as his wife and brother-in-law.

"Not nonsense at all, Paul," cried Herval. "He is making straight for the house, so I shall be off as fast as I can by the back door. I am not fond of making low bows, and standing with my hat in my hand when I can help it."

"Stay, stay," cried Virlay; "do not go yet, Armand; I have much to talk with you about."

But his brother-in-law shook his head, and darted through the oak door we have mentioned into the room beyond. Madame Virlay bestirred herself to give order and dignity to the breakfast-table; but, before she could accomplish that purpose, the count was in the open passage, and knocking at the door of the room for admission.

Virlay opened it immediately, and the young nobleman entered with that frank and graceful bearing which was part, indeed, of his inheritance, but which secured to him that hereditary love for his race which the virtues and kindness of his forefathers had established among the people.

"Good-morrow, Virlay," he said. "Good-morrow, Madame Virlay! Oh, my pretty Margette; why, you have grown so great a girl that I must call you so no longer, lest the people say that I am making love to you. Virlay," he added, in a graver tone, "I would fain speak a word or two with you on business. I would not send for you to the chateau for various reasons; but cannot we go into the next room for a moment or two?"

Virlay made a sign to his wife and daughter to retire,

and placed a seat for the count. "No, my lord," he said, "you shall not give yourself that trouble. Shut the door, wife, and, remember, no eaves-dropping!"

"Bless thee, Paul," exclaimed his wife, bridling with a little indignation, "do you think I would listen to what my lord count says to you? I know better, I trust," and she shut the door.

Perhaps neither the count, however, nor Virlay were quite certain of the lady's discretion under such circumstances, and they therefore both remained near the window, and conversed in low tones.

"I come to speak to you, Virlay," said the count, in somewhat of a grave tone, "both as an influential man and as a sensible man, though he may have his little faults," he added, fixing his eyes somewhat meaningly upon the blacksmith's face, "and who may suffer himself to be a little too much led by others; but who, nevertheless, has the best intentions, I know, and who will always, sooner or later, remember that one must not do wrong that right may come of it."

The blacksmith replied nothing, but kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, though the red became somewhat deeper in his brown cheek, and an expression of consciousness was to be seen in every feature of his countenance.

"What I want to speak with you about is this," continued the count: "since I have been away during this last campaign, there has sprung up, it seems, a dangerous band in this part of the province, consisting of men who are carrying on a system of violence, depredation, and intimidation, which must be put a stop to. What I want to consult with you in regard to, is the best means of putting down this band, for put down I am determined it shall be, and that right speedily."

"You will not be able to put them down, my lord!" replied the blacksmith. "If mere simple plunder were the object of these persons, the thing would be easily done. You would have the whole people to aid you, and nothing would be more easy. But, my lord, such is not the case. The men may plunder—I do not say that it is not so—but they only plunder their enemies. It has always been so in this part of the country, as the good count, your father, well knew, and always will be so to the end of the world. People have given these bands different names at different times, and from dif-

ferent circumstances. Once they were called *les Faucons*, because, at that time, the minister was sending down men into the country, taxing the salt and the fish; and, when any of them came, one of these hands stooped upon him like a falcon, carried him off, and he was never heard of more. At another time they were called *les Eperviers*, the hawks, because they hovered over all the country and caught what they could. That was the time when the king sent down so many soldiers that they could not carry off the collectors without hovering round them for a long time. Now they call them *les Chauve-souris*, or the bats, because they fly about just at the setting-in of night, and wo be to the persecuting papist that falls in their way. To-morrow, if obliged to do the work later at night, they may be called *les Hiboux*, or the owls; and the time may come, perhaps, when they will be called *les Loups* or *les Chouettes*, the wolves or the screech-owls: but they will do no harm to any one but their enemies. An honest man, who seeks to harm nobody, may go from one end of the province to another, ay, and through all Brittany, too, as well as Poitou, without meeting with the least annoyance. But if it be different, if he be an oppressor of the people, a seller of men's souls, let him see that he travels by daylight only, and even then he won't be very safe."

"I do not know," said the count, "that I am either an oppressor of the people, or a buyer and seller of men's souls; and yet, my good friend Virlay, these Chauve-souris, as you call them, fastened their claws upon me, and put me to no slight inconvenience and discomfort. They might have shot me, too, for they fired right at my horse. You have heard of all this before, I dare say," he added, with a smile.

The blacksmith did not reply for a moment; but then he said, "I dare say, my lord, it was some mistake. I doubt not that they did not know you, or that some foolish fellow, as will happen sometimes, went beyond his orders."

"But then again," said the count, "they both attacked and plundered two ladies, defenceless women, who could have given them no offence."

"Some hangers-on of a governor that was sent down to oppress the province," replied the blacksmith,

"These bands, my lord, know all that's passing through the country better than you do yourself."

"But in this instance," said the count, "they certainly knew not what they were about; for, instead of a governor sent down to oppress the province, Monsieur de Rouvré is the very man to stand between the province and oppression, and, from all I hear, is likely to give up the post and the court, and retire to Ruffigny, if the measures of the council are what he judges unfair towards us."

"If he do that," said the blacksmith, "he will have a better body-guard at Ruffigny than ever he had at Poitiers. But what is it you want me to do, Monsieur le Comte? I have no power to put down these bands, I have no sway with them or against them."

"What I want you to do," replied the count, "is to use your whole power and influence, in every way, to put a stop to a system which cannot be suffered to go on. Sorry should I be to draw the sword against these mistaken people; but I must have them no more on the lands and lordships of Morseiul, where they have quartered themselves, I find, during my absence. I must have my forests free of such deer; and you know, Virlay, when I say a thing I will keep my word. I have been in their hands, and they were civil to me, respected my person, did something towards obeying my directions; and, although I know two of them, however well concealed they might be," he added, laying strong emphasis on the words, "I will in no degree betray the knowledge I acquired. I only wish to make it fully understood that I wish this band to be dispersed. I am well aware of the evil custom that you allude to, and how deeply it has rooted itself in the habits of the people; but I tell you, Virlay, that this is likely to produce more evil to the cause of the reformed church than anything that could be devised. At all events, it is contrary altogether to the laws of the land and to civil order, and, whatever be the pretext, I will not tolerate it on my lands. I wish the bands to be dispersed, the night-meetings to be abandoned, the men to pursue their lawful employments, and in other hours to take their necessary rest. But, at all events, as I have said before, within my jurisdiction they shall not remain. If they go to the lands of other lords, I cannot, of course, help it; but I trust that those other lords will have

spirit and decision enough to drive them off their territories. Let us say no more about it, Virloy. You understand me distinctly, and know my whole meaning; and now let me know when and how I may best obtain a meeting with a person called Brown Keroual, for I must make him hear reason also."

The blacksmith paused for two or three minutes before he answered. "Why, my lord," he said at length, "I ought not to tell you anything about him, perhaps, by that name. On all accounts, perhaps I ought not; but yet I know I can trust you, and I am sure you will take no advantage. So I'll only ask you one thing, not to go down to where he is with too many people about you, for fear of bad consequences if there should be any of his folks about."

"I shall go down," said the count, "towards the place where I hear he is generally to be met with with only two servants; and, when I come near enough, I shall give the horse to the servants, and walk forward on foot."

"You will be as safe as in your own chateau, then," said the blacksmith; "but you must not go for a couple of days, as where he will be to-morrow and next day I cannot tell. But if, on the day after, you will be just at the hour when the bat begins to flit at a little turn of the river about six miles down—you know the high rock just between the river and the forest, with the tall tree upon it, which they call the *chêne vert*—"

"I know it well. I know it well," said the count. "But on which side of the rock do you mean? the tall face flanks the river, the back slopes away towards the wood."

"At the back, at the back," replied the blacksmith. "Among the old hawthorns that lie scattered down the slope. You will find him there at the hour I mention."

"I will be there," said the count, in reply; "and I will allow the intervening time for the band to quit the woods of Morseiul. But if it have not done so by the morning after, there will be a difference between us which I should be sorry for."

Thus saying, the count left the worthy townsman and took his way back to the chateau.

In the two days that intervened nothing occurred to vary the course of his existence. He entertained some expectation of receiving letters from Poitiers, but none

arrived. He heard nothing from the governor, from the Chevalier d'Evran, or from Clémence de Marly; and from Paris, also, the ordinary courier brought no tidings for the young count. A lull had come over the tempestuous season of his days, and we shall now follow him on his expedition to the *chêne vert*, under which, be it said, we have ourselves sat many an hour thinking over and commenting upon the deeds we now record.

The count, as he had said, took but two servants with him, and rode slowly on through the evening air, with his mind somewhat relieved by the absence of any fresh excitement, and by the calm, refreshing commune of his spirit with itself. On the preceding day there had been another thunder-storm; but the two which had occurred had served to clear and somewhat cool the atmosphere, though the breath of the air was still full of summer.

When at the distance of about a mile and a half from the spot which the blacksmith had indicated, the count gave his horse to his servants, and bade them wait there for his return. He wandered on slowly, slackening his pace as much to enjoy the beauty and brightness of the scene around, as to let the appointed time arrive for his meeting with the leader of the band we have mentioned. When he had gone on about a hundred yards, however, he heard in the distance the wild but characteristic notes of a little instrument, at that time, and even in the present day, delighted in throughout Poitou, and known there by the pleasant and harmonious name of the *musette*. Sooth to say, it differs but little, though it does in a degree, from the ordinary bagpipe; and yet there is not a peasant in Poitou, and scarcely a noble of the province either, who will not tell you that it is the sweetest and most harmonious instrument in the world. It requires, however, to be heard in a peculiar manner and at peculiar seasons: either, as very often happens in the small towns of that district, in the dead of the night, when it breaks upon the ear as the player walks along the street beneath your window, with a solemn and plaintive melody, that seems scarcely of the earth; or else in the morning and evening tide, heard at some little distance among the hills and valleys of that sunny land, when it sounds like the spirit of the winds singing a wild ditty to the loveliness of the scene.

The Count de Morseiul had quite sufficient national, or, perhaps we should say, provincial, feeling to love the sound of the musette; and he paused to listen, as, with a peculiar beauty and delicacy of touch, the player poured on the sounds from the very direction in which he was proceeding. He did not hasten his pace, however, enjoying it as he went; and still the nearer and nearer he came to the *chêne vert*, the closer he seemed to approach to the spot whence the sounds issued. It is true the player could not see him, as he came in an oblique line from the side of the water, to which, at various places, the wood approached very near. But the moment that the count turned the angle of the rock which we have mentioned, and on the top of which stood the large evergreen oak from which it took its name, he beheld a group which might well have furnished a picture for a Phyllis and a Corydon to any pastoral poet that ever penned an idyl or an eclogue.

Seated on a little grassy knoll, under one of the green hawthorns, was a girl, apparently above the common class, with a veil, which she seemed to have lately worn over her head, cast down beside her, and with her dark hair falling partly upon her face as it bent over that of a man, seated, or rather stretched, at her feet, who, supporting himself on one elbow, was producing from the favourite instrument of the country the sounds which the count had heard.

Lying before them, and turning its sagacious eyes from the face of the one to the face of the other, was a large rough dog, and the girl's hand, which was fair and small, was engaged in gently caressing the animal's head as the count came up. So occupied were they with each other, and so full were the tones of the music, that it was the dog who first perceived the approach of a stranger, and bounded barking forward towards the count, as if the young nobleman were undoubtedly an intruder. The girl and her lover—for who could doubt that he was such!—both rose at the same time, and she, casting her veil over her head, darted away with all speed towards the wood, while her companion called after her, "Not far, not far."

The count then perceived, somewhat to his surprise, that the veil she wore was that of a novice in a convent. Notwithstanding the barking of the dog, and the somewhat fierce and uncertain aspect of his master, the

count advanced with the same slow, steady pace, and in a minute or two after was standing within five steps of Armand Herval. That good personage had remained fixed to his place, and for some time had not recognised the young count; but, the moment he did so, a change came over his countenance, and he saluted him with an air of military respect.

"Good-day, Armand," said the count; "I am afraid I have disturbed your young friend; but pray go after her, and tell her that I am neither spy nor enemy, so she need not be alarmed. Come back and speak to me, however, for I want a few minutes' conversation with you. Have you seen your brother-in-law, Virlay, lately?"

"Not for several days," replied Armand; "but I will go after her, my lord, and see her safe, and come back to you in a minute."

"Do so," replied the count, "and I will wait for you here. Will you not stay with me, good dog?" he added, patting the dog's head and casting himself down upon the ground; but the dog followed his master, and the count remained alone, thinking over the little picture which had been so unexpectedly presented to his eyes.

"This lets me into much of the history," he thought. "Here is a motive and an object both for accumulating wealth and intimidating the papists! But how can he contrive to get the girl out of a convent to sit with him here, listening to him playing the musette, while it is yet the open day! It is true, we are a great distance from any town or village. The only religious house near, either, is that upon the hill two miles farther down. Though I cannot prevent this business, I must give him some caution;" and then he set himself to think over the whole affair again, and to endeavour to account for an event which was less likely, perhaps, to take place in that province, in the midst of a Protestant population, than in any other part of France.

Some time passed ere Armand Herval returned, and by this time the twilight was growing thick and gray.

"It is later than I thought, Herval," said the young count, rising from the ground, on which he had been stretched, as the other came up; "I shall hardly have time to say all I had to say, even if the person were here that I came to converse with."

"Then you did not come to see me, my lord?" de-

manded Herval, in a tone perhaps expressive of a little mortification.

"No, Herval," replied the count, with a slight smile, "I came to see a person called Brown Keroual: but," he added, after a moment's pause, "if you are likely to stay here, I will leave the message with you."

The count stopped as if for a reply, and his companion answered, "Speak, speak, my lord count! Your message shall not fail to reach him."

"Well, then, Armand," replied the nobleman, "tell Keroual this for me: first, that I know him; that I recognised him the moment he spoke when last we met; but that, having some regard for him, I do not intend to take any advantage whatever of that knowledge to his prejudice, although he be engaged in wrong and unlawful deeds. However, I came here to meet him, in order to reason with him on his conduct, for he is a good and a gallant soldier, and would now have been an officer—for I recommended him for advancement—had it not been for that plundering of the priory of St. Amand, which was thrown in my teeth by Monsieur de Louvois whenever I mentioned his name."

"If Louvois had been in it," replied his companion, "it would not have escaped half as well as it did; for I think, according to the very doctrines of their popish church, the good act of burning one Louvois would be quite enough to obtain pardon for the sin of burning a whole score of monks along with him. But what were you going to say farther, sir?"

"Why, to Brown Keroual," continued the count, "I was going to say that he is engaged in a matter contrary to all law and order, heading a band of robbers which must be—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Herval, somewhat impatiently, "not robbers! If you please, a band of *chouve-souris*. They rob no man: they only plunder the enemy; and let me tell you, my lord count, that there is many a man more or less joined with that band who would just as soon think of robbing another as you would. Has anything been asked for the ring, though it was the ring of a papist? Was not the money that was taken from you restored?"

"It was," replied the count; "but we must not be too nice about our terms, Herval. I do not know any law, human or divine, that allows a man to pick and

choose, at his own will and pleasure, whom he will rob and whom he will murder."

"Ay, my noble lord," answered the man, getting warm; "but there is a law of nature, which, after all, is a law of God, and which not only justifies, but requires us to destroy him who would destroy us; and, whether it is straightforwardly that he is seeking our destruction, or by cunning and crooked paths, it matters not, we have a right to prevent him by every means in our power; and, if we catch hold of him, to knock him on the head like a viper or any other noxious vermin."

"In all cases but direct attack," answered the count, "civil society gives our defence into the hands of the law."

"But when the law and its ministers are leagued with the destroyers, with the real plunderers, with the real disturbers of the public peace," exclaimed the man, vehemently, "we must make a new law for ourselves, and be its officers also."

The count did not interrupt him, as he was very well pleased to be made acquainted clearly with all the views and opinions of that body of men whom Armand Herval might be supposed to represent; and the soldier went on, with great volubility and some eloquence, to defend the right of resistance with all the well-known arguments upon the subject, which have been repeated and combated a thousand times; but he came not a bit nearer than any who had gone before him to the real question at issue, namely, where the duty of submission ceased and the right of resistance began. We must remember that not only the higher orders, but also the lower classes of French Protestants, were at that time much more generally enlightened and accustomed to the use of their own reason than the Catholics, and the natural consequence of any attempt to oppress them was to render such arguments as those used by Herval very common among them. Neither was the Count de Morseuil prepared to oppose the general scope of the man's reasoning, though he was determined to resist the practical misapplication of it, which was then actively going on in the province.

"I will not argue with you, Herval," he said, "nor will I attempt to persuade you that what the council is doing now, and may do against us poor Protestants, is right, feeling it, as I do, to be wrong. But, nevertheless,

I think—nay, I am sure—that such proceedings as those of the band we speak of are perfectly incompatible with our duty to our king and our fellow-subjects, and likely to produce infinitely greater evil to the reformed religion than good. The existence of such bands will give an excuse for sending a large military force into the province, for persecuting the Protestants still farther, and for taking such precautions that, even if a crisis were to come, in which the resistance to oppression which you speak of were necessary, it would be rendered hopeless by the prepared state of the enemy. In the mean time it is wrong, because, at the best, it is carrying on what you call hostilities without a declaration of war; it is dangerous to the peaceful even of our own friends, as has been shown in my case, and in that of two ladies of the governor's family, who is most warmly interested in our behalf; and it is degrading a powerful and just cause in the eyes of all men, by giving its supporters the air of night plunderers."

"As for a declaration of war," replied Herval, "they have made that themselves by their own acts; and as to the rest of what you say, sir, there are objections certainly. Did I but see our noblemen like yourself, and our ministers preparing a good resistance to tyranny and injustice, I would be as quiet as a lamb. But I see nothing of the kind; you are all sitting still in your houses, and waiting till they come to cut your throats. So, as there must and shall be resistance of some kind, and it must begin by the lower instead of the higher, we must even take the lesser of two evils, and go on as we have done."

Armand Herval spoke, as was common with him when at all heated, with very little reverence or respect in his tone; but Albert of Morseiul was not of a character to suffer himself to be irritated in the slightest degree by any want of formal respect. No man knew better how to preserve his own dignity without making any exaction, and he accordingly replied, with perfect calmness,

"I should be sorry, Armand, that our good friend Brown Keroual should persist in conduct which may make a division among different classes of the Protestants at the very moment that we require union for our common safety. You will, therefore, let him know at once that I am determined, upon my own lands, to put

an end to this system; that my forest and my moors shall no longer hold these *chauve-souris*. The day after to-morrow I shall begin my operations, and, as I know the country as well as any man in it, shall have no difficulty in putting my plans in execution. Keroual knows me for a man of my word, and I must not have one single man disguised and in arms anywhere within my jurisdiction at the end of three days from this time."

The man smiled with a grim but less dissatisfied look than the count had expected. "They none of them wish to give you offence, sir," he replied, "and can easily move off your lands to others."

"That they *must* do," replied the count; "but there is something more still to be said. When once off my lands, they may doubtless consider that the matter is at an end: but such is not the case."

"My lord, if you follow us off your lands," said Armand, dropping farther disguise, and making use of the pronoun of the first person, "if you follow us off your own lands, you must take the consequences."

"I am always prepared to do so," replied the count. "My purpose is not, of course, to follow any of you off my own lands unless I am summoned to do so; but if I am summoned, which will immediately be the case if there be any renewal of outrages whatsoever, I shall most assuredly use my whole power and employ my whole means to put down that which I know to be wrong."

The man to whom he spoke gazed sternly upon the ground for a moment or two, and seemed to be struggling with various contending feelings. "Come, my lord count," he said at length, "I will tell you what. Every one who has served under you knows that you are as brave a man, as kind an officer, and as skilful a commander as any that ever lived, and we are all willing to do what we can to please you in your own way. If you would put yourself at our head, there is not a man among us that would not follow you to death itself. No, but hear me out, my lord; don't answer till you have heard. We get quicker information than even you can get, for with us it flies from mouth to mouth like lightning. We have no long written letters, but, as soon as a thing is known, one man tells it to another, and so it comes down here. Now we know what most likely you don't know, that everything is

settled in Paris for putting down the reformed religion altogether. We know, too, which I see you don't know, that the Duc de Rouvré has received orders from the court to resign the government of the province, and retire to Ruffigny without presenting himself at the court. Now depend upon it, my lord, before a fortnight be over, you will have to rouse yourself against this oppression, to make the voice of remonstrance heard in firmer tones, and with arms in your hand. You know it as well as I do, and I know you are no more afraid of doing it than I am ; but only, like all the rest of the people about the court, you have gone mad concerning a thing called loyalty, and have got your head filled with ideas of respect and veneration for the king—simply because he is the king and wears a crown—when, if the truth were known, he is not so much worthy of respect and veneration as any of our peasants who drive a team of oxen, with a whip of sheep leather, from one end of the field to the other. A selfish, voluptuous, adulterous tyrant—”

“Hush, hush,” exclaimed the count ; “I can neither stay nor hear if you proceed in such terms as those.”

“Well, well,” said the man, “though what I say is true, and you know it, my lord count, I won't go on if it offends you. But what I was going to say besides is this : You have got your head filled with these ideas ; you wish to do everything respectfully and loyally ; you wish to show the most profound respect for the law, and be compelled to resist before you do resist. But are our enemies doing the same towards us ? Are they showing any respect for the law, or for justice, or good faith, honour, honesty, or treaties ? No, no, they are taking step by step, and ruining us piecemeal ! My lord, you are like a man in a fortress, with a truce between him and a perfidious enemy, who takes advantage of his good nature to get possession of one outpost after another, then marches over the glacis, lodges himself on the counterscarp, erects his batteries, points his cannon, and says, ‘Now surrender, or I'll blow you to pieces !’ This is what you are suffering to be done, my lord ; and, at one word, if you, count, will come and put yourself at our head to resist oppression, you shall have two hundred men at one whistle ; and, ere five days be over, you shall have two thousand ; before ten days, ten thousand. Will you do it ?”

"Undoubtedly not," replied the count. "Were the time to come that, all other means having failed, I should be forced to stand upon my own defence and the defence of my fellow Protestants, I would openly plant my banner on the hill of Morseiul, stand upon the straightforward justice of my cause, point to the unvarying loyalty of my life, and demand simple justice for myself and my brethren."

"And you would find all confusion and consternation in your own party," replied the man; "not a skeleton even of a regiment ready to support you; the timid abandoning you, and the brave unprepared. You would find, on the other side, the enemy upon you before you knew where you were; instead of justice you would get persecution, and, before a fortnight was over, your head would be rolling about the Place de Grève. Well, well, be it so! I will help you yet, whether you like it or not; and, when the day of danger comes, you may find Brown Keroual and his band nearer to your hand than you imagine. In the mean time, we will keep as quiet as may be. But if you hear of a few Jesuits and Lazarites being hung, you need not be surprised, that's all. Have you anything farther to say to me, my lord? for it is now quite dark; and, like a sober, peaceable man," he added, with a laugh, "I must be going home to supper. One or two of my companions may come to fetch me, too."

"I have nothing farther to say, Armand," replied the count, "except, perhaps, it were a word of caution about that young person I saw with you just now; and who, I must say, I was sorry to see with you."

"Why, my lord, why?" demanded the man, quickly; "you don't suppose I would do her hurt. I would not injure her, so help me God! for the whole world. If you had not come up, I should have taken her back in five minutes."

"I do not suppose you would wrong her, Herval," said the count, "by no means do I suppose such a thing; but she out here with you, with a novice's veil on! She is evidently some Roman Catholic girl in a monastery, and I would have you cautious on that account."

"Oh, my lord," replied the man, "the time for caution is all over now. We are soon coming to a setting to rights of all those things. Quiet cannot be kept up

above a fortnight longer, and then the doors of more than one convent will be as wide open as the sea. One of three things must then happen. We shall either have established our rights, and my little novice will be out of her fetters; or we shall be defeated and I killed, and that matter over; or defeated, yet living and flying away with her, pretty soul, to some country where we may be united in peace."

"Yes, yes," replied the count; "but you do not reflect what you may bring upon her head in the mean time. She may be removed from that convent to another, where you can never reach her. If these wanderings with you are detected, she may be subjected, too, to punishments and penances such as you have no idea of."

The man laughed aloud. "No fear, my lord, no fear," he said; "the good mothers dare no more send her away than they dare lose their right hand. They would fancy the convent in flames the very first night she slept out of it. Why, she is their guardian angel, at least so they think; and she is specially appointed to bring their tribute, consisting of a silver crown and a flask of wine, twice in the week to Brown Keroual, in virtue of which they obtain his protection against all bands and companies whatsoever. The only stipulation they made when the tribute was demanded was, that he was on no account to tell the director; and when the director, who is a greater old woman than any one among them, heard it in confession, he added a fifteen sous piece once a week for himself, with no other stipulation than that Brown Keroual was not to tell the bishop; so that twice in the week the dear child brings me the tribute—ay, and the real tribute for which I sought—of her own sweet company. Nobody dares watch her, nobody dares follow her; and as she is always absent the same time, and always back again before the bat's wing is to be seen flitting in the air, they ask no questions, but, judging the distance long, exempt her from vespers, that she may accomplish it more easily. And now, my lord count," he continued, "I must leave you, for my people will be waiting for me. I think where we now stand is off your lordship's ground, for I could not well give up this meeting-place. But farther I shall not come till the time when you shall be very willing to thank Brown Keroual for his help."

The count made no reply to his words, but, wishing him good-night, he left him and rejoined his servants. He then rode quickly homeward, but was somewhat surprised, as he climbed the steep towards the castle, to see a full blaze of light pouring through the windows of the lesser hall. On entering the gates, however, he saw several horses and servants in the liveries of the Chevalier d'Evran, and found his friend seated at supper in the hall above.

"You see, Albert," said the chevalier, rising and grasping his hand as he came in, "you see what liberties I take, and what account I make of your friendship. Here I come, and order all sorts of viands without ceremony, simply because I have ridden hard and am desperately an hungered."

His countenance was frank and open, though not, perhaps, so cheerful in its expression as usual; his manner was free and unembarrassed, and seemed not as if anything that had occurred at Poitiers would have the slightest tendency to diminish the friendship and intimacy that existed between him and the count. Albert of Morseiul, however, could not feel exactly the same. He could not divest his mind of a vague feeling of jealous disquietude in regard to the confident intimacy which seemed to exist between the Chevalier d'Evran and Clémence de Marly. However hopeless might be his own love towards her; however much he might have taught himself that despair was in his case wisdom; however strong might be his resolutions to resist every temptation to seek her society any more, there was something painful to him that he could not overcome in the idea of the chevalier being constantly at her side; and although his regard and affection for his friend were not diminished, yet there was an unpleasant feeling at his heart when he saw him which perhaps might make some difference in his manner.

"Many thanks for doing so, Louis," he answered, struggling hard against his own feelings, "many thanks for doing so. What news bring you from Poitiers?"

The chevalier did not appear to feel any difference in the manner of his friend, and replied, "But little news, Albert, and that not good. I was but one day in Poitiers before I set off in haste. I found everything in confusion and derangement. The states split into factions; the governor, the intendant, and the bishop at

open war with each other; cabals of the basest and blackest character going on in every quarter of the town; good Madame de Rouvré wishing her husband anything but a governor; and Clémence de Marly looking pale, ill, and sorrowful. I stayed but a sufficient time," he continued, not giving the count an opportunity to make any observations, "I stayed but a sufficient time to make myself thoroughly acquainted with all that was proceeding, and then set off at once, for the purpose of proceeding to Paris with all speed. I came to spend two or three hours with you, Albert, at the most, for I must hurry on without delay. The king, you know, is my godfather, and I trust that my representation of what is taking place at Poitiers may do some good. If it do not, De Rouvré is ruined, and a most pitiful intrigue triumphant."

"I trust in Heaven that you may be successful," replied the count; "but proceed with your supper, D'Evran."

"I will, I will," replied the chevalier; "but will you let me give you one more proof of how much at home I can make myself in your house, by giving an order to your servants?"

"Most assuredly," replied the count; "you have nothing to do but to speak."

"It is this, then," said the chevalier; "you will be good enough, Master Jerome Riquet, to make all these worthy gentlemen who are assisting you to serve my supper march out of the room in single file. Now come, Master Riquet, do it in an officer-like way. You have seen service, I know."

Riquet seemed well pleased at the honourable task conferred upon him, and, according to the chevalier's direction, made the servants troop out of the room one by one, he himself preparing to remain as a confidential person to serve the count and his friend during the conversation which he doubted not was to ensue. The chevalier, however, as soon as he saw himself obeyed so far, again raised his voice, saying,

"Now, Master Riquet, you have executed the manoeuvre so well, that it is a pity your men should be without their officer. You will be good enough to follow them."

Riquet made a sort of semi-pirouette on the tips of

his toes, and disappointed, though perhaps not surprised, marched out of the room and shut the door.

"Albert," said the chevalier, as soon as he was gone, "I am afraid, very much afraid, that all is lost for the cause of you Huguenots. There are people about the king who must be mad to counsel him as they do. All the news I have, which perhaps you know already, is as sad as it can be. There wants but one more step to be taken for the utter abolition of what you call the reformed religion in France—I mean the abolition of the privileges granted by the edict of Nantes—and perhaps that step will be taken before I can reach Paris."

"So quickly?" exclaimed the count.

"Even so!" rejoined his friend. "All the madlike steps which have been taken by the council have been applauded by one general roar of the whole clergy of France. Petition after petition has come in from every Catholic body through the land, beseeching the king to do you every sort of injustice, and I feel convinced that they are persuading him, while he is risking a civil war, ruining his provinces, and exasperating some of his most faithful subjects, that he is acting justly, politically, and religiously, and is, in short, a saint upon earth, notwithstanding all his mistresses. I pretend to no power over the king or influence with him, except inasmuch as I can often say to him, in my wild, rambling way, things that nobody else could say, and dare to tell him, under the same cloak, many an unpleasant fact that others will not tell him. However, my object now is to open his eyes about De Rouvré, to whom I am too deeply bound by ties of gratitude to see him injured and caluminated, if I can help it. I would fain ask you, Albert, what you intend to do, how you intend to act, when these rash measures are pushed to the extreme against you; but yet it is unfair to give you the pain of refusing me, and, perhaps, unwise to seek a share in secrets which I ought not to know, or, knowing, to reveal."

"As far as anything has yet passed," replied the count, "there is nothing either to conceal or to reveal, Louis. It will be difficult for the king to tire out my loyalty. I am determined to bear to the very utmost. What I shall do when the very utmost bound of endurance is passed I do not know, having, as yet, settled nothing in my own mind."

"I cannot think," continued the chevalier, "that the king will individually treat you ill, who have served him so well; but, with regard to your religion, depend upon it, the utmost extremes are determined upon already."

"I grieve to hear it," replied the count, "but it is not more than I expected. The rapidity of these measures gives no time for calm and loyal remonstrance or petition to make the king aware of the real truth."

"Such is indeed the case," said the chevalier. "Couriers are arriving at Poitiers and taking their departure again five or six times in the day, killing the horses on the road, setting off fat men themselves and returning thin. I know this is no joking matter, Albert, and I am anxious to do what little good I can. I am therefore going to follow the example of these couriers, and, as soon as I have seen the king, and obtained some satisfaction on these matters, I shall return hither with all speed to watch the progress of events, and, if possible, to shield and protect my friends. In this quarter of the world," he added, holding out his hand to the count with a frank smile, "in this quarter of the world are all those for whom I entertain any very sincere affection; De Rouvré, who has befriended me from my youth, and never lost an opportunity of serving me; you, Albert, who have been my companion for many years in perils and dangers, to whom I owe the immense benefit of a good example, and the no less inestimable blessing of a noble mind to communicate with under all circumstances."

"And Clémence de Marly," said the count, with a melancholy smile; "of course you will add Clémence de Marly, chevalier."

"Assuredly," replied the chevalier, "assuredly, Albert, I will add Clémence de Marly. I will not ask you, Albert, why you look at me reproachfully. Clémence, I believe from my heart, loves you, and I scruple not to tell you so. If it were not for the cursed obstacle of your religion, you might both be happy. That is a terrible obstacle, it is true; but were it not for that, I say, you might both be happy, and your example and her love for you might do away the only faults she has, and make her to you a perfect angel, though there is not one other man in France, perhaps, whom she could endure or render happy. She also, and her fate, are among

the objects of my journey to Paris; but of that I shall tell you nothing till I can tell you all."

"I know you are a man of mysteries," said the count, with a faint smile, "and therefore I suppose I must neither attempt to investigate this, nor to inquire how it is that the gay and gallant Chevalier d'Evran is in one way insensible to charms which he is so sensible of in other respects."

"You are right, Albert, not to make any such attempt," replied the chevalier. "With respect to love for Clémence, a thousand causes may have produced the peculiar feelings I entertain towards her. I may *have loved* and been cured."

The count made no reply, but fell into a reverie; and, after gazing on him for a minute or two, the chevalier added, "You, Albert, love her, and are not cured."

His friend, however, was still silent; and, changing the conversation, the chevalier talked of indifferent things, and did not return to subjects of such painful interest, till midnight came, and he once more took his departure from the chateau of Morseiul.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PREACHING IN THE DESERT.

AGAIN we must pass over a brief space of time, and also somewhat change the scene, but not very far. In the interval, the acts of a bigoted and despotic monarch had been guided by the advice of cruel and injudicious ministers, till the formal prohibition of the opening of any Protestant place of worship throughout France for the service of God, according to the consciences of the members of the reformed church, had been proclaimed throughout the land. Such had been the change, or, rather, the progress, made in that time; and the falling off of many leading Protestants, the disunion which existed among others, the overstrained loyalty of some, and the irresolution of many, had shown to even the calmer and the firmer spirits, who might still have conducted resistance against tyranny to a successful result,

that though, perhaps, they might shed oceans of blood, the Protestant cause in France was lost, at least for the time.

The scene, too, we have said, was changed. It was no longer the city of Poitiers, with its multitudes and its gay parties; it was no longer the chateau, with its lord and his attendants; it was no longer the country town, with its citizens and its artisans; but it was upon one of those dark brown moors, of which so many are to be found on the borders of Brittany and Poitou, under the canopy of heaven alone, and with nothing but the bleakest objects in nature round about.

The moor had a gentle slope towards the westward. It was covered with gorse and heath, interspersed with old ragged hawthorns, stunted and partly withered, as we often see, some being brought up in poverty and neglect, never knowing care or shelter, stunted and sickly, and shrivelling with premature decay. Cast here and there among the thorns, too, were large masses of rock and cold gray stone, the appearance of which in that place was difficult to account for, as there was no higher ground around from which such masses could have fallen. A small wood of pines had been planted near the summit of the ground, but they, too, had decayed prematurely in that ungrateful soil; and though each tree presented here and there some scrubby tufts of dark green foliage, the principal branches stood out, white and blasted, skeleton fingers pointing in despairing mockery at the wind that withered them.

The hour was about six o'clock in the evening; and, as if to accord with the earth below it, there was a cold and wintry look about the sky which the season did not justify; and the long blue lines of dark cloud, mingled with streaks of yellow and orange towards the verge of heaven, seemed to bespeak an early autumn. There was one little pond in the foreground of the picture, sunk deep among some banks and hawthorn bushes, and looking dark and stern as everything around it. Flapping up from it, however, scared by the noise of a horse's feet, rose a large white stork, contrasting strangely with the dim shadowy waters.

The person that startled the bird, by passing nearer to him than anybody else had done, rode forward close by the head of the pond to a spot about three hundred yards farther on, where a great multitude of people were

assembled, perhaps to the number of two thousand. He was followed by several servants; but it is to be remarked that both servants and lord were unarmed. He himself did not even wear the customary sword, without which not a gentleman in France was seen at any distance from his own house; and no apparent arms of any kind, not even the small knife or dagger, often worn by a page, was visible among the attendants. There was a buzz of many voices as he approached, but it was instantly silenced, when, dismounting from his horse, he gave the rein to a servant, and then advanced to meet one or two persons who drew out from the crowd as if privileged by intimacy to speak with him. The first of these was Claude de l'Estang, whose hand he took and shook affectionately, though mournfully. The second was a tall, thin, ravenous-looking personage, with sharp-cut, lengthened features, a keen, but somewhat unsettled, we might almost use the word phren-sied, eye, and an expression of countenance altogether neither very benevolent nor very prepossessing. He also took the count's hand, saying, "I am glad to see thee, my son; I am glad to see thee. Thou art somewhat behind the time; and, in this great day of back-sliding and falling off, I feared that even thou, one of our chief props and greatest lights, might have departed from us into the camp of the Philistines."

"Fear not, Monsieur Chopel," replied the count; "I trust there is no danger of such weakness on my part. I was detained to write a letter in answer to one from good Monsieur de Rouvré, who has suffered so much in our cause, and who, it seems, arrived at Ruffigny last night."

"I know he did," said Claude de l'Estang; "but pray, my dear Albert, before either myself or our good brother, Monsieur Chopel, attempt to lead the devotions of the people, do you speak a few words of comfort and consolation to them, and, above all things, counsel them to peace and tranquil doings."

The count paused and seemed to hesitate for a moment. In truth, the task that was put upon him was not pleasant to him, and he would fain have avoided it; but, accustomed to overcome all repugnance to that which was right, he conquered himself with scarcely a struggle, and advanced with Claude de l'Estang into the midst of the people, who made way with respectful rev-

erence as he sought for some slightly elevated point from which to address them more easily. Chopel and L'Estang, however, had chosen a sort of rude rock for their pulpit before he came, and, having been led thither, the count mounted upon it, and took off his hat as a sign that he was about to speak. All voices were immediately hushed, and he then went on.

"My brethren," he said, "we are here assembled to worship God according to our own consciences, and to the rules and doctrines of the reformed church. In so doing we are not failing in our duty to the king, who, as sovereign of these realms, is the person whom, under God, we are most bound to obey and reverence. It has seemed fit to his majesty, from motives upon which I will not touch, to withdraw from us much that was granted by his predecessors. He has ordered the temples in which we are accustomed to worship to be closed, so that, on this the Sabbath day, we have no longer any place of permitted worship but in the open air. That, however, has not been denied us; there is no prohibition to our meeting and praising God here, and this resource at least is allowed us, which, though it may put us to some slight inconvenience and discomfort, will not the less afford the sincere and devout an opportunity of raising their prayers to the Almighty, in company with brethren of the same faith and doctrines as themselves. We know that God does not dwell in temples made with hands; and I have only to remind you, my brethren, before giving place to our excellent ministers, who will lead our devotions this day, that the God we have assembled to worship is also a God of peace, who has told us, by the voice of his Son, not to revile those who revile us, nor smite those that smite us, but to bear patiently all things, promising that those who endure to the last shall be saved. I appointed this place," he continued, "for our meeting, because it was far from any town, and, consequently, we shall have few here from idle curiosity, and afford no occasion of offence to any man. I begged you earnestly to come unarmed also, as I myself have done, that there might be no doubt of our views and purposes being pacific. I am happy to see that all have followed this advice, I believe without exception, and also that there are several women among us, which, I trust, is a sign that, in the strait and emergency in which we now are, they

will not abandon their husbands, their fathers, and their brothers for any inducement, but continue to serve God in the faith in which they have been brought up."

Having thus spoken, the count gave place and descended among the people, retiring several steps from the little sort of temporary pulpit, and preparing to go through the service of the reformed church as if he had been within the walls of the temple his father had built in Morseiul, and which was now ordered to be levelled with the ground.

After a few words between Claude de l'Estang and Chopel, the latter mounted the pulpit and gave out a psalm, the —, which he led himself, in a voice like thunder. The whole congregation joined; and though the verses that they repeated were in the simple, unadorned words of the olden times, and the voices that sung them not always in perfect harmony, yet the sound of that melody in the midst of the desert had something strangely impressive, nay, even affecting. The hearts of a people that would not bow down before man, bowed down before God; and they who, in persecution and despair, had lost all trust on earth, in faith and hope raised their voices unto heaven with praise and adoration.

When the psalm was over, and the minds of all men prepared for prayer, the clergyman who had given out the psalm, closing his eyes and spreading his hands, turned his face towards the sky and began his address to the Almighty. We shall not pause upon the words that he made use of here, as it would be irreverent to use them lightly; but it is sufficient to say, that he mingled many themes with his address that both Claude de l'Estang and the Count de Morseiul wished had been omitted. He thanked God for the trial and purification to which he had subjected his people; but, in doing so, he dwelt so long upon, and entered so deeply into, the nature of all those trials and grievances, and the source from which they sprang; pointed out with such virulent acrimony the tyranny and the persecution which the reformed church had suffered; and clothed so aptly, nay, so eloquently, his petition against the persecutors and enemies of the church in the sublime language of scripture, that the count could not but feel that he was very likely to stir up the people to seek their deliverance with their own hand, and think themselves fully justified

by holy writ; or, at all events, to exasperate their already excited passions, and render the least spark likely to cast them into a flame.

Albert of Morseiul was uneasy while this was proceeding, especially as the prayer lasted an extraordinary length of time, and he could not refrain from turning to examine the countenances of some of the persons present, in order to discover what was the effect produced upon them, especially as he saw a man, standing between him and the rock on which the preacher stood, grasp something under his cloak, as if the appearance of being unarmed was in that case not quite real. Near to him were one or two women, wrapped up in the large gray cloaks of the country, and they obstructed his view to the right; but, at some distance straight before him, he saw the burly form of Virilay, the blacksmith, and close by him again the stern but expressive countenance of Armand Herval. Scattered round about, too, he remarked a considerable number of men, with a single cock's feather stuck in the front of the hat, which, though bands of feathers and similar ornaments were very much affected, even by the lower classes of that period, was by no means a common decoration in the part of the country where he then was.

Everything, indeed, was peaceable and orderly in the demeanour of the crowd: no one pressed upon the other, no one moved, no one spoke, but each and all stood in deep silence, listening to the words of the minister; but they listened with frowning brows and stern dark looks, and the young count felt thankful that the lateness of the hour and the distance from any town rendered it unlikely that the proceedings would be interrupted by the interference, or even appearance, of any of the Catholic authorities of the province.

The prayer of the clergyman Chopel at length came to an end; and, as had been previously arranged between them, Claude de l'Etang, in turn, advanced. Another hymn was sung; and the ejected minister of Auron commenced, what was then called among the Huguenots of France, "the preaching in the desert." On mounting the rock that served them for a pulpit, the old man seemed a good deal affected; and twice he wiped away tears from his eyes, while he gazed round upon the people with a look of strong interest and affection, which every one present saw and felt deeply. He then

paused for a moment in silent prayer, and, when it was concluded, took a step forward with the Bible open in his hand, his demeanour changed, the spirit of the orator upon him, and high and noble energy lighting up his eyes and shining on his lofty brow.

"The nineteenth verse of the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke," he said. "*In your patience possess ye your souls!*"

"My brethren, let us be patient, for to such as are so is promised the kingdom of heaven. My brethren, let us be patient, for so we are taught by the living word of God. My brethren, let us be patient, for Christ was patient, even unto death, before us. What! shall we know that the saints and prophets of God have been scorned, and mocked, and persecuted, in all ages? what! shall we know that the apostles of Christ, the first teachers of the gospel of grace, have been scourged, and driven forth, and stoned, and slain? what! shall we know that, for ages, the destroying sword was out, from land to land, against our brethren in the Lord? what! shall we know that he himself closed a life of poverty and endurance, by submitting willingly to insult, buffeting, and a torturing death? and shall we not bear our cross meekly? What! I ask again, shall we know that the church of Christ was founded in persecution, built up by the death of saints, cemented by the blood of martyrs, and yet rose triumphant over the storms of heathen wrath; and shall we doubt that yet, even yet, we shall stand and not be cast down? Shall we refuse to seal the covenant with our blood, or to endure the reproach of our Lord even unto the last?

"Yes, my brethren, yes! God will give you, and me also, grace to do so; and though 'ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death,' yet the faithful and the true shall endure unto the last, and '*in your patience possess ye your souls.*'"

"But there is more required at your hands than patience, my brethren. There is constancy! perseverance in the way of the Lord! There must be no falling off in the time of difficulty or danger; there must be no hesitation in the service of our God. We have put our hands to the plough, and we must not look back. We have engaged in the great work, and we must not slacken our diligence. Remember, my brethren, remember,

that the most fiery persecution is but the trial of our faith, and all who strive for a great reward, all who struggle for the glory of the kingdom of heaven, must be as gold ten times purified in the fire. Were it not so even—were we not Christians—had we not the word of God for our direction—had we not the command of Christ to obey, where is the man among us that would falsify the truth, declare that thing wrong which he believed to be right, swear that he believed that which he knew to be false, put on the garb of hypocrisy, and clothe himself with falsehood as with a garment, to shield himself from the scourge of the scorner or the sword of the persecutor?

“If there be such a coward or such a hypocrite here, let him go forth from among us, and Satan, the father of lies, shall conduct him to the camp of the enemy. Where is the man among us, I say, that, were there nothing to restrain him but the inward voice of conscience, would show himself so base as to abandon the faith of his fathers in the hour of persecution?

“But when we know that we are right; when the word of God is our warrant; when our faith in Christ is our stay; when the object before us is the glory of God and our own salvation, who would be fool enough to barter eternal condemnation for the tranquillity of a day? Who would not rather sell all that he has, and take up his cross and follow Christ, than linger by the fleshpots of Egypt, and dwell in the tents of sin?

“Christ foretold, my brethren, that those who followed him faithfully should endure persecution to the end of the earth. He won us not by the promises of earthly glory, he seduced us not by the allurements of worldly wealth, he held out no inducement to our ambition by the promises of power and authority, he bribed not our pride by the hope of man’s respect and reverence. Oh, no; himself, *The Word of God*, which is but to say all in one word, *Truth*; he told us all things truly; he laid before us, as our lot below, poverty, contempt, and scorn, the world’s reproach, the calumny of the evil, chains, tortures, and imprisonment, contumely, persecution, and death. These he set before us as our fate, these he suffered as our example, these he endured with patience for our atonement! Those who became followers of Christ knew well the burden that they took up; saw the load that they had here to bear; and, strengthened by faith and by the Holy Spirit, shrunk

not from the task, groaned not under the weight of the cross. They saw before their eyes the exceeding great reward—the reward that was promised to them, the reward that is promised to us, the reward that is promised to all who shall endure unto the last—to enter into the joy of our Master, to become a partaker of the kingdom reserved for him from before all worlds.

“We must therefore, my brethren, endure; we must endure unto the last: but we must endure with patience, and with forbearance, and with meekness, and with gentleness; and ‘it shall turn to us for a testimony,’ it shall produce for us a reward. They may smite us here, and they may slay us, and they may bring us down to the dust of death; but he has promised that not a hair of our heads shall perish, and that *in our patience shall we possess our souls*.

“The wo that he denounced against Jerusalem, did it not fall upon it? When the day of vengeance came, that all things written were to be fulfilled, did not armies compass it about, and desolation draw nigh unto it, and was not distress great in the land and wrath upon the people, and did not millions fall by the sword, and were not millions led away captives into all nations, and was not Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles, and was there one stone left upon another?

“If, then, God, the God of mercy, so fulfilled each word, when kindled to exercise wrath, how much more shall he fulfil every tittle of his gracious promises to those that serve him? If, then, the prophecies of destruction have been fulfilled, so also shall be the prophecies of grace and glory, by Him whose words pass not away, though heaven and earth may pass away. For sorrows and endurance in time, he has promised us glory and peace in eternity; and for the persecutions which we now suffer, he gives to those who endure unto the last the recompense of his eternal joy.

“With endurance we shall live, and *with patience we shall possess our souls*; and we—if we so do, serving God in this life under all adversities—shall have peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding; joy, the joy of the Lord, who has trodden down his enemies; glory, the glory of the knowledge of God, when he cometh with clouds and great glory, and every eye shall see him, and they, also, which pierced him, and

all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

The words of the preacher were poured forth rather than spoken. It seemed less like eloquence than like inspiration. His full, round, clear voice was heard through every part of his large auditory; not a word was lost, not a tone was indistinct, and the people listened with that deep stern silence which causes a general rustle, like the sighing of the wind, to take place through the multitude when he paused for a moment in his discourse, and every one drew deep the long-suppressed breath.

In the same strain, and with the same powers of voice and gesture, Claude de l'Estang was going on with his sermon, when some sounds were heard at the farther part of the crowd, towards the spot where the scene was sheltered by the stunted wood we have mentioned. As those sounds were scarcely sufficient to give any interruption to the minister, being merely those apparently of some other persons arriving, the Count de Morseiul, and almost every one on that side of the preacher, remained gazing upon him as he went on with the same energy, and did not turn their heads to see what occasioned the noise.

Those, however, who were on the opposite side, and who, when looking towards the minister, had at the same time in view the spot from which the sounds proceeded, were seen to gaze sternly from time to time in that direction; and once or twice, notwithstanding the solemn words they heard, stooped down their heads together, and spoke in whispering consultation. These appearances at length induced the Count de Morseiul to turn his eyes that way; when he beheld a sight which at once made his blood boil, but made him thankful also that he had come in such guise as even to act as a restraint upon himself, having no arms of any kind upon him.

At the skirt of the crowd were collected a party of eighteen or twenty dragoons, who were forcing their horses slowly in among the people, who drew back and gazed upon them with looks of stern, determined hatred. The purpose of the soldiers, indeed, seemed to be simply to insult and to annoy, for they did not proceed to any overt act of violence, and were so far separated from each other, in a disorderly manner, that it could only be

supposed they came thither to find themselves sport rather than to disperse the congregation by any lawful authority. The foremost of the whole party was the young Marquis de Hericourt; and Albert of Morseiul conceived, perhaps not unreasonably, that there might be some intention of giving him personal annoyance at the bottom of that young officer's conduct.

Distinguished from the rest of the people by his dress, the count was very plainly to be seen from the spot where De Hericourt was, and the young dragoon slowly made his way towards him through the press, looking at the people on either side with but ill-concealed signs of contempt upon his countenance.

The count determined, as far as possible, to set an example of patience; and when the rash youth came close up to him, saying aloud, "Ha, Monsieur de Morseiul, a lucky opportunity! I have long wished to hear a *prêche*," the count merely raised his hand as a sign for the young man to keep silence, and pointed with his right hand to the pastor, who, with an undisturbed demeanour and steady voice, pursued his sermon as if not the slightest interruption had occurred, although the young dragoon on horseback in the midst of his people was at that moment before him.

De Hericourt was bent upon mischief, however. Rash to the pitch of folly, he had neither inquired nor considered whether the people were armed or not; but, having heard that one of the preachings in the desert was to take place, he had come, unauthorized, for the purpose of disturbing and dispersing the congregation, not by the force of law, but by insult and annoyance, which he thought the Protestants would not dare to resist. He listened, then, for a moment or two to the words of Claude de l'Estang, seeming, for an instant, somewhat struck with the impressive manner of the old man; but he soon got tired, and, turning the bridle of his horse as if to pass round the Count de Morseiul, he said again, aloud, "You've got a number of women here, Monsieur de Morseiul; pretty little heretics, I've no doubt! I should like to have a look at their faces."

So saying, he spurred on unceremoniously, driving back five or six people before him, and caught hold of one of the women—whom we have noticed as standing not very far from the Count de Morseiul—trying, at the

same time, to pull back the thick veil which was over her face.

The count could endure no longer, more especially as, in the gray cloak and the veil with which the person assailed by the dragoon was covered, he thought he recognised the dress of the lady he had formerly seen at the house of Claude de l'Estang.

Starting forward, then, instantly to her side, he seized the bridle of De Hericourt's horse, and forced the animal back almost upon his haunches. The young officer stooped forward over his saddle bow, seeking for a pistol in his holster, and at the same moment addressing an insulting and contemptuous term to the count. No sooner was it uttered, however, than he received one single buffet from the hand of Albert of Morseiul which cast him headlong from his horse into the midst of the people.

Every one was rushing upon him; his dragoons were striving to force their way forward to the spot; the voice of Claude de l'Estang, though exerted to its utmost power, was unheard; and, in another instant, the rash young man would have been literally torn to pieces by the people he had insulted.

But with stern and cool self-possession, the Count de Morseiul strode over him, and held back those that were rushing forward with his powerful arms, exclaiming, in a voice of thunder,

"Stand back, my friends, stand back! This is a private quarrel. I must have no odds against an adversary and a fellow-soldier. Stand back, I say! We are here man to man, and whoever dares to take him out of my hands is my enemy, not my friend. Rise, Monsieur de Hericourt," he said, in a lower voice; "rise, mount your horse, and be gone. I cannot protect you a minute longer."

Some of the count's servants, who had been standing near, had by this time made their way up to him, and with their help he cleared the space around, shouting to the dragoons who were striving to come up, and had not clearly seen the transaction which had taken place, "Keep back, keep back! I will answer for his life! If you come up there will be blood shed!"

In the mean time the young man had sprung upon his feet, his dress soiled by the fall, his face glowing like fire, and fury flashing from his eyes.

"You have struck me," he cried, glaring upon the count; "you have struck me, and I will have your blood."

"Hush, sir," said the count, calmly. "Do not show yourself quite a madman. Mount your horse, and be gone while you may! I shall be at the chateau of Morseiul till twelve o'clock to-morrow," he added, in a lower voice. "Mount, mount!" he proceeded, in a quicker manner, seeing some movements on the other side of the crowd of a very menacing kind; "mount, if you would live and keep your soldiers' lives another minute!"

De Hericourt sprang into the saddle, and while the count, in that tone of command which was seldom disobeyed, exclaimed, "Make way for him there; let no one impede him;" he spurred on quickly through the crowd, gathering his men together as he went.

All eyes were turned to look after him; but the moment he and his troop were free from the people at the extreme edge of the crowd, he was seen to speak a word to the man at the head of the file. The soldiers immediately halted, faced round, and, carrying firearms as they did, coolly unslung their carbines.

The first impulse of that part of the crowd nearest to the dragoons was to press back, while those on the opposite side strove to get forward, headed by Virlay and Armand Herval. The crush in the centre was consequently tremendous; but the Count de Morseiul succeeded in casting himself between the female he had saved and the troopers. At the very moment that he did so, the dragoons raised their fusees to their shoulders, and fired at once into the midst of the compact mass of people. Every shot told; and one unfortunate young man, about two paces from the Count de Morseiul, received no less than four shots in his head and throat. A mingled yell of rage and agony rose up from the people, while a loud exulting laugh broke from the soldiery. But their triumph was only for a moment, for they were instantly assailed by a shower of immense stones, which knocked one of the troopers off his horse, and killed him on the spot.

Herval and Virlay, too, made their way round behind the rock on which the clergyman had been standing, and it now became apparent that, in that part of the crowd at least, arms were not wanting, for flash after

flash broke from the dense mass of the advancing multitude, and swords and pikes were seen gleaming in the air.

The troopers at length turned their horses and fled, but not before they had suffered tremendously. The Huguenots pursued, and with peculiar skill and knowledge of the country, drove them hither and thither over the moor. Some, having mounted the horses which brought them thither, pursued them into spots that they could not pass, while some on foot defended the passes and ravines. The Count de Morseuil and his servants mounted instantly, and rode far and wide over the place, attempting to stop the effusion of blood, and being, in many instances, successful in rescuing some of the soldiery from the hands of the people and from the death they well deserved. Thus passed more than an hour, till, seeing that the light was beginning to fail, and that the last spot of the sun was just above the horizon, the count turned back to the scene of that day's unfortunate meeting, in the hope of rendering some aid and assistance to the wounded who had been left behind.

He had by this time but one servant with him; and, when he came to the spot where the meeting had been held, he found it quite deserted. The wounded and the dead had been carried away by those who remained; and, of the rest of the people who had been there, the greater part had been scattered abroad in pursuit of the fugitive soldiers, while part had fled in fear to their own homes. There was nothing but the cold gray rock, and the brown moor stained here and there with blood, and the dark purple streaks of the evening sky, and the east wind whistling mournfully through the thin trees.

"I think, sir," said the servant, after his master had paused for some moments in melancholy mood, gazing on the scene around, "I think, sir, that I hear voices down by the water, where we put up the stork as we came."

The count listened, and heard voices too, and he instantly turned his horse thither. By the side of that dark water he found a melancholy group, consisting of none other but Claude de l'Estang and two female figures, all kneeling round or supporting the form of a third person, also a female, who seemed severely hurt. This was the sight which presented itself to the eyes of the count from the top of the bank above; and, dismounting, he sprang down to render what assistance he could.

His first attention was turned, of course, almost entirely to the wounded girl, whose head and shoulders were supported on the knee of one of the other women, while the pastor was pouring into her ear, in solemn tones, the words of hope and consolation; but they were words of hope and consolation referring to another world. The hand that lay upon her knee was fair and soft, the form seemed young and graceful; and though the count, as he descended, could not see her face, the novice's veil that hung from her head told him a sad tale in regard to the story of her life. He doubted not, from all he saw, that she was dying; and his heart sickened when he thought of the unhappy man who had brought her thither, and of what would be the feelings of his fierce and vehement heart when he heard the fate that had befallen her.

He had scarcely time to think of it, for, ere he had well reached the bottom of the descent, the sound of a horse coming furiously along was heard, and Armand Herval paused on the opposite side of the dell, and gazed down upon the group below. It seemed as if instinct told him that there was what he sought; for, without going on to the moor, he turned his horse's rein down the descent, though it was steep and dangerous, and in a moment had sprung from the beast's back and was kneeling by her he had loved.

It is scarcely to be told whether she was conscious of his presence or not, for the hand of death was strong upon her; but it is certain that, as he printed upon her hands the burning kisses of love in agony, and quenched them with his tears, it is certain that a smile came over her countenance before that last awful shudder with which the soul parted from the body for ever.

After it was all over he gazed at her for a single instant without speaking. Every one present saw that he acted as if of right, and let him do what he would; and unpinning the veil from her long beautiful hair, he took and steeped it in the blood that was still, notwithstanding all that had been done to stanch it, welling from a deep wound in her breast, till every part of the fabric was wet with gore. He then took the veil, placed it in his brown, scarred bosom—upon his heart; and, raising his eyes and one hand to Heaven, murmured some words that were not distinctly heard. He had not uttered one

audible sentence since he came up; but he now turned, and with a tone of entreaty addressed Claude de l'Estang.

"The spirit will bless you, sir," he said, "for giving her comfort in the hour of death! May I bear her to your house till eleven o'clock to-night, when I may remove her to her own abode?"

"I must not refuse you, my poor young man," replied the clergyman. "But I fear that my house will be no safe resting-place, even for the dead, just now."

Herval grasped his arm, and said, in a low but emphatic tone, "It is safe, sir, against all the troops in Poitou. How long it may be so I cannot tell; but, as long as this arm can wield a sword, it shall not want defence. My Lord Count," he added, pointing to the dead body, "did I not hear that you meet her murderer to-morrow at noon?"

"I know not the hour or place he may appoint," replied the count, in a low, deep voice; "but we do meet! and there are things that call aloud for vengeance, Herval, which even I cannot forgive."

The man laughed aloud, but that laugh was no voice of merriment. It was dreary, boding, horrible, and in good accordance with the circumstances and the scene. He replied nothing to the words of the count, however, turning to the pastor and saying, "Now, sir, now! If you will give shelter to the dead for but an hour or two, you shall win deep gratitude of the living."

"Willingly," replied the pastor. "But, then," he added, turning to one of the other two women who were present, "who shall protect you home, dear lady?"

"That will I do, at the risk of my life," said the count; and the other woman, whom the pastor had not addressed, replied, "It will be better so. We have been too long absent already."

Armand Herval had not noticed the brief words that were spoken, for he was gazing with an intense and eager look upon the fair countenance of the dead, with bitter anguish written in every line of his face. The pastor touched his arm gently, saying, "Now, my son, let you and I carry the body. We can pass through the wood unseen."

But the other put him by with his hand, saying, in a sad tone, "I need no help;" and then kneeling down by her side, he put his arms around her, saying, "Let me bear thee in my bosom, sweet child, once only, once

before the grave parteth us, and ere it shall unite us again. Oh, Claire, Claire," he added, kissing her cold lips passionately, "oh, Claire, Claire, was it for this I taught thee a purer faith, and brought thee hither to see the worship of the persecuted followers of the cross? Was it for this I bent down my nature, and became soft as a woman to suit my heart to yours? Oh, Claire, Claire, if I have brought thee to death, I will avenge thy death; and for every drop that falls from my eyes, I will have a drop of blood."

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!" the old man said, in a low tone; "but let us haste, my son, for night is coming on fast. Farewell, lady. Albert, I trust them to thee. We shall meet again; if not here, in heaven!"

Armand Herval took the corpse of the fair girl who had fallen in his powerful arms, and bore her after the pastor towards the wood we have mentioned, while his horse, trained so to do, followed him with a regular pace, and entered the road through the copse immediately after him.

Albert of Morseiul remained alone with the two ladies, his interposition in favour of one of whom had brought on the sad events which we have detailed. As soon as the pastor was gone, he advanced towards her, and held out both his hands with deep emotion. "I cannot be mistaken," he said. "The disguise might deceive any other eyes, but it cannot mine. Clémence! it must be Clémence! Am I not right?"

She put her hands in his in return, saying, "Oh, yes, you are right! But what, what shall I do, Monsieur de Morseiul? I am faint and weary with agitation, and all this terrible scene. I have left the carriage that brought me hither at two or three miles' distance, and perhaps it, too, has gone away on the report of the fliers from this awful place."

"I will send up my servant immediately," said the count, "to see; and, in the mean time, rest here, Clémence. In this deep hollow we shall escape all passing eyes till his return, and you will have more shelter than anywhere else. Where can the servant find the carriage?"

Clémence, who had raised her veil, looked towards her companion to explain more fully than she could do. But her attendant, Maria—for such was the person who accompanied her—judging, perhaps, that a word spoken

at such a moment between two people, situated as were Clémence de Marly and the Count de Morseiul, might have more effect than whole hours of conversation at another time, took upon herself the task of telling the servant, saying, "I can direct him, my lord, better than any one. It were as well to bring your horse down here before he goes."

The count assented, and with a slow step she proceeded to fulfil her errand.

Clémence de Marly trembled not a little. She felt that the moment for the decision of her fate for life was come. She felt that her heart and her faith must be plighted to Albert of Morseiul at that moment, or, perhaps, never. She felt that, if she did so plight it, she plighted herself to care, to grief, to anxiety, to danger, perhaps to destruction, perhaps to desolation. But that very feeling took away all hesitation, all scruple, and made her, in a moment, make up her mind to let him see her heart as it really was, to cast away from her every vain and every proud feeling, and to stand before him she loved without disguise. The count, too, felt, and felt strongly, that this was a moment which must not be let pass; and the instant the attendant had quitted them, he raised the lady's hand to his lips, pressing on it a warm and passionate kiss.

"Tell me, Clémence, tell me, dear Clémence," he said, "what is the meaning of this? What is the meaning of your presence here? Is it, is it that the only barrier which existed between us is removed? Is it that you are of the same faith as I am?"

"Is that the only barrier, Albert?" she said, shaking her head somewhat reproachfully. "Is that the only barrier? You spoke of many."

"I spoke of only one insurmountable," replied the count, "and I believed that to be insurmountable, Clémence, for I was even then aware of the decree, which did not appear till afterward, but which forbade the marriage of Catholics and Protestants."

"And was that the only insurmountable one?" she demanded. "Was that the only insurmountable barrier to our union? What if I had previously loved another?"

"And is it so, then?" demanded the count, with somewhat of sadness in his tone. "And have you before loved another?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Clémence, eagerly, and placing

the hand which she had withdrawn in his again; "no, no! The woman was coming over me once more, but I will conquer the woman. No, I never did love another. Even if I had fancied it, I should now know, Albert, by what I feel at this moment, how idle such a fancy had been. But I never did fancy it. I never did believe it, even in the least degree; and now that I have said all that I can say, whatever may happen, never doubt me, Albert. Whatever you see, never entertain a suspicion. I have never loved another, and I can say nothing more."

"Yes, yes! oh, yes!" he exclaimed, "you can say more, Clémence. Say that you love me."

She bent down her head, and Albert of Morseiul drew her gently to his bosom. "Say it! Say it, dear Clémence!" he said.

Clémence hesitated, but at length she murmured something that no other ear but his could have heard, had it been ever so close. But he heard, and heard aright, that her reply was, "But too well!"

The count sealed the words upon her lips with his, and Clémence de Marly hid her eyes upon his shoulder, for they were full of tears. "And now," she added, raising them after a moment with one of her own sparkling smiles, "and now, having said those awful words, of course I am henceforth a slave. But this is no scene for jest, Albert. Desolation and destruction is round us on every side, I fear."

"It matters not," replied the count, "if thy faith is the same as mine is—"

"It is, it is!" cried Clémence. "It may have wavered, Albert; but, thanks to yon good creature who has just left us, the light has never been wholly extinguished in my mind. My mother was a Protestant, and in that faith she brought me up. She then, knowing that I must fall into other hands, left Maria with me, with charges to me never to let her quit me. I was but a child then," she continued, "and they forced me to abjure. But their triumph lasted not an hour; for, though I dared not show my feelings, I always felt that the path on which they would lead me was wrong, and strove, whenever I could, to return to a better way. To-day I came here at all risks; but I fear very much, Albert, I fear that destruction, and oppression, and grief, surround us on every side."

"If thy faith be the same as mine, Clémence," said the count; "if thy heart be united with mine, I will fear nothing, I will dare all. If they will not suffer us to live in peace in this our native land, fortunately I have just transmitted to another country enough to support us in peace, and tranquillity, and ease. And yet, oh yet, Clémence," he continued, his tone becoming sadder and his countenance losing its look of hope, "and yet, oh yet, Clémence, when I think of that unhappy man who has just left us, and of the fair girl whose corpse he has now borne away in his arms; when I remember that scarcely more than eight days have passed since he was animated with the same hopes that I am, founding those hopes upon the same schemes of flight, and trusting more than I have ever trusted to the bright hereafter; when I think of that and of his present fate, the agony that must now be wringing his heart, the dark obscurity of his bitter despair, I tremble to dream of the future, not for myself, but for thee, sweet girl. But we must fall upon some plan both of communicating when we will, and of acting constantly on one scheme and for one object. Here comes your faithful attendant. She must know our situation and our plans; only one word more. You have promised me this," he continued, once more raising her hand to his lips.

"When and where you will," replied Clémence.

"And you will fly with me whenever I find the opportunity of doing so?"

"I will," she answered.

The attendant had now approached, and the count took a step towards her, still holding Clémence by the hand, as if he feared to lose the precious boon she had bestowed upon him.

"She is mine, madame," he said, addressing the attendant. "She is mine, by every promise that can bind one human being to another."

"And you are hers?" demanded the attendant, solemnly. "And you are hers, my Lord Count, by the same promises?"

"I am, by everything I hold sacred," said the count, raising his hand towards Heaven, "now and for ever, till death take me from her. But, ere we can be united, I fear, I fear that many things must be undergone. Alas, that I should recommend it! but she must even conceal her faith: for, from the cruel measures of the court,

even now death or perpetual imprisonment in some unknown dungeon is the only fate reserved for the relapsed convert, as they call those who have been driven to embrace a false religion, and quitted it in renewed disgust. But I must trust to you to afford me the means of communicating with her at all times. The only chance for us, I fear, is flight."

"It is the only one! it is the only one!" replied the maid. "Fly with her to England, my lord. Fly with her as speedily as possible. Be warned, my lord, and neither delay nor hesitate. The edge of the net is just falling on you. If you take your resolution at once, and quit the land before a week be over, you may be safe; but, if you stay longer, every port in France will be closed against you."

"I will make no delay," replied the count. "Her happiness and her safety are now committed to my charge; inestimable trusts, which I must on no account risk. But I have some followers and dependants to provide for, even here. I have some friends to defend; and I must not show myself remiss in that, or she herself would hardly love me. It were easy, methinks, however, for you and your mistress to make your escape at once to England, and for me to join you there hereafter."

"Oh no, my lord, I fear not!" replied the maid. "I do not think Monsieur de Rouvré himself would object to her marrying you and flying. He shrewdly suspects, I think, that she is Protestant at heart; but he would never yield to her flying herself. But, hark! I hear horses coming. Let us draw back and be quiet."

"There is no sound of carriage-wheels, I fear," said Clémence, listening. "Oh, Albert, all this day's sad events have quite overpowered me, and I dread the slightest sound."

The count pressed her hand in his, and, as was usual with him in moments of danger, turned his eyes towards his swordbelt, forgetting that the blade was gone. The sound of horses' feet approaching rapidly, however, still continued; and, at length, a party of four persons, whose faces could not be well distinguished in the increasing darkness, stopped exactly opposite the spot where a little rough road led down into the hollow where the lovers were. One of the riders sprang to the ground in a

moment, and, leaving his horse with the others, advanced, exclaiming aloud,

"Hollo! Ho! Albert de Morseiul! Hollo! where are you!"

"It is the voice of the Chevalier d'Evran," cried Clémence, clinging closer to her lover, as if with some degree of fear.

"I think it is," said the count; "but fear not! He is friendly to us all. Draw down your veil, however, my beloved; it is not necessary that he should see and know you."

With the same shout the chevalier continued to advance towards them, and the count took a step or two forward to meet him. But, shaking his friend warmly by the hand, the chevalier passed on at once to the lady, and, to the surprise of the count, addressed her immediately by her name: "Very pretty, indeed, Mademoiselle Clémence!" he said; "this is as dangerous a jest, I think, as ever was practised."

Clémence hesitated not a moment, but replied at once, "It is no jest, sir! It is a dangerous reality, if you will."

"Poo, poo, silly girl," cried the chevalier. "By the Lord that lives, you will get yourself into the Castle of Pignerol, or the Bastile, or some such pleasant abode! I have come at full speed to bring you back."

"Stay yet a minute, Louis," said the count, somewhat gravely. "There is another person to be consulted in this business whom you do not seem to recollect. Mademoiselle de Marly is, for the time, under my protection; and you know we delegate such a duty to no one."

"My dear count," replied the chevalier, "the good Duc de Rouvré will doubtless be infinitely obliged to you for the protection you have given to this fair lady; but, having sent me to find her and bring her back, I must do so at once; and will only beg her to be wise enough to make no rash confessions as she goes. The affair, as far as she is concerned, is a jest at present: it is likely, I hear, to prove a serious jest to others. I left your man, who directed me hither, to bring up the carriage as far as possible: and now, Mademoiselle Clémence, we will go, with your good pleasure."

The tone of authority in which the chevalier spoke by no means pleased Albert of Morseiul, who felt strong

in his heart the newly-acquired right of mutual love to protect Clémence de Marly himself. He was not of a character, however, to quarrel with his friend lightly, and he replied, "Louis, we are too old friends for you to make me angry. As your proposal of conveying Mademoiselle de Marly back in her own carriage coincides with what we had previously arranged, of course I shall not oppose it; but equally, of course, I accompany her to Ruffigny."

"I am afraid that cannot be, Albert," answered the chevalier; and the resolute words, "It must be!" had just been uttered in reply, when Clémence interfered.

"It is very amusing, gentlemen," she said, in her ordinary tone of scornful playfulness, "it is very amusing, indeed, to hear you calmly and quietly settling a matter that does not in the least depend upon yourselves. You forget that I am here, and that the decision must be mine. Monsieur le Chevalier, be so good as not to look authoritative, for, depend upon it, you have no more power here than that old hawthorn stump. Monsieur de Rouvré cannot delegate what he does not possess; and as I have never yet suffered any one to rule me, I shall not commence that bad practice to-night. You may now tell me, in secret, what are your motives in this business; but, depend upon it, that my own high judgment will decide in the end."

"Let it!" replied the chevalier; and bending down his head, he whispered a few words to Clémence in a quick and eager manner. She listened attentively, and, when he had done, turned at once to the Count de Morseiul, struggling to keep up the same light manner, but in vain.

"I fear," she said, "Monsieur de Morseiul, that I must decide for the plan of the chevalier, and that I must lay my potent commands upon you not to accompany or follow me. Nay, more, I will forbid your coming to Ruffigny to-morrow; but the day after, unless you hear from me to the contrary, you may be permitted to inquire after my health."

Albert of Morseiul was deeply mortified; too much so, indeed, to reply in any other manner than by a stately bow. Clémence saw that he was hurt; and, though some unexplained motive prevented her from changing her resolution, she cast off reserve at once, and, holding out her hand to him, said aloud, notwith-

standing the presence of the chevalier, "Do you forgive me, Albert?"

Though unable to account for her conduct, the count felt that he loved her deeply still, and he pressed his lips upon her hand warmly and eagerly, while Clémence added, in a lower tone, but by no means one inaudible to those around who chose to listen, "Have confidence in me, Albert! Have confidence in me, and remember you have promised never to doubt me, whatever may happen. Oh, Albert, having once given my affection, believe me utterly incapable of trifling with yours even by a single thought."

"I will try, Clémence," he replied; "but you must own there is something here to be explained."

"There is!" she said, "there is; and it shall be explained as soon as possible; but, in the mean time, trust me! Here comes the servant, I think: the carriage must be near."

It was as she supposed; and the count gave her his arm to assist her in climbing back to the level ground above, saying, at the same time, in a tone of some coldness, which he could not conquer, "As the lady has herself decided, chevalier, I shall not, of course, press my attendance farther than to the carriage door; but have you men enough with you to ensure her safety? It is now completely dark."

"Quite enough!" replied the chevalier, "quite enough, Albert;" and he fell into silence till they reached the side of the vehicle, dropping, however, a few yards behind Clémence and her lover.

Every moment of existence is certainly precious, as a part of the irrevocable sum of time written against us in the book of life; but there is no occasion on which the full value of each instant is so entirely felt, in which every minute is so dear, so treasured, so inestimable in our eyes, as when we are about to part with her we love. Albert of Morseiul felt that it was so: and in the few short moments that passed ere they reached the carriage, words were spoken in a low murmuring tone, which, in the intensity of the feelings they expressed and excited, wrought more deeply on his heart and hers than could the passage of long indifferent years. They were of those few words spoken in life that remain in the ear of memory for ever.

The fiery hand that, at the impious feast, wrote the

fate of the Assyrian in characters of flame, left them to go out extinguished when the announcement was complete; but the words that the hand of deep and intense passion writes upon firm, high, and energetic hearts, remain for ever, even unto the grave itself.

Those moments were brief, however, and Clémence and her attendant were soon upon their way; the chevalier sprang upon his horse, and then held out his hand frankly to the count. "Albert," he said, laughing, "I have never yet beheld so great a change of Love's making as that which the truant boy has wrought in thee. Thou wouldst even quarrel with thy oldest and dearest companion—thou who art no way quarrelsome. You have known me now long, Albert; love me well still. If you have ever seen me do a dishonest act, cast me off; if not, as I heard Clémence say just now—trust me!" and, thus saying, he galloped off, without waiting for any reply.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REVENGE.

WHILE Clémence de Marly cast herself back in the carriage, and, with the great excitement under which she had been acting for some time, now over, hid her eyes with her hands, and gave herself up to deep, and even to painful thought; while over that bright and beautiful countenance came a thousand varied expressions as she recollected all that had passed; while the look of horror rose there as she remembered all the fearful scenes she had beheld, the murderous treachery of the dragoons, the retribution taken by the people, and the death of the unhappy girl who had received one of the random shots; while that again was succeeded by the expression of admiration and enthusiasm, as she recalled the words and conduct of the Protestant pastor; and while a blush, half of shame and half of joy, succeeded, as she remembered all that had passed between her and Albert of Morseiul, the count himself was wend-

ing his way slowly homeward, with feelings different from hers, and by no means so happy.

She knew that difficulty and danger surrounded her; she knew that much was necessarily to be endured, much to be apprehended; but she had woman's greatest, strongest consolation. She had the great, the mighty support, that she was loved by him whom alone she loved. With her, that was enough to carry her triumphant through all danger; to give her a spirit to resist all oppression; to support her under all trials; to overcome all fears.

It may be asked, when we say that Albert of Morseuil's feelings were different, whether he then loved her less than she loved him; whether love in his bosom was less powerful, less all-sufficing than in hers. It would seem strange to answer no; yet such was not the case. He loved her as much, as deeply as she did him; he loved her as tenderly, as truly. His love—though there must always be a difference between the love of man and the love of woman—was as full, as perfect, as all-sufficing as her own, and yet his bosom was not so much at ease as hers, his heart did not feel the same confidence in its own happiness that hers did. But there were many different causes combined to produce that effect. In the first place, he knew the dangers, the obstacles, the difficulties, far better than she did. He knew them more intimately, more fully, more completely; they were all present to his mind at once; no bright hopes of changing circumstances came to relieve the prospect; but all, except the love of Clémence de Marly, was dark, obscure, and threatening around him. That love might have seemed, however, but as a brighter spot amid the obscurity, had it not been that apprehensions for her were now added to all his apprehensions for his religion and his country. It might have seemed all the brighter for the obscurity, had it been itself quite unclouded; had there not been some shadows, though slight, some mystery to be struggled with, something to be forgotten or argued down.

During the few last minutes that he was with her, the magic fascination of her presence had conquered everything, and seated love triumphant above all; but, as he rode on, Albert de Morseuil pondered over what had occurred, thought of the influence which the Chevalier d'Evrans had exerted over her, combined it with what he

had seen before at Poitiers, and pronounced it, in his own heart, "very strange." He resolved not to think upon it, and yet he thought. He accused himself—the man of all others the least suspicious on the earth by nature—he accused himself of being basely suspicious. He argued with himself that it was impossible that either on the part of Clémence or the chevalier there should be anything which could give him pain, when each, in the presence of the other, behaved to him as they had behaved that night; and yet there was something to be explained, which hung—like one of those thin veils of cloud that sometimes cover even the summer sun, prognosticating a weeping evening to a blithe noon—which hung over the only star that fate had left to shine upon his track, and he thought of it sadly and anxiously, and longed for something to bear it far away.

He struggled with such feelings and such reflections for some time; and then, forcing his thoughts to other things, he found that there was plenty, indeed, for him to consider and to provide against, plenty to inquire into and to ponder over, ere he resolved or acted. First came the recollection of the quarrel between himself and the young De Héricourt. He knew that the rash and cruel young man had made his escape from the field, for he himself, with two of his servants, had followed him close, and, by detaining a party of the pursuers, had afforded the commander of the dragoons an opportunity to fly. That he would immediately require that which is absurdly called satisfaction, for the blow which had been struck, there could be no earthly doubt, although the laws against duelling were at that time enforced with the utmost strictness, and there was not the slightest chance whatsoever of the king showing mercy to any Protestant engaged in a duel with a Roman Catholic.

No man more contemned or reprobated the idiotical custom of duelling than the count himself; no man looked upon it in a truer light than he did; but yet must we not forgive him, if, even with such feelings and with such opinions, he prepared, without a thought or hesitation, to give his adversary the meeting he demanded? Can we severely blame him if he determined, with his own single arm, to avenge the wanton slaughter that had been committed, and to put the barrier of a just punishment between the murderer of so many innocent

people and a repetition of the crime! Can we blame him, if, seeing no chance whatsoever of the law doing justice upon the offender, he resolved—risking, at the same time, his own life—to take the law into his hand, and seek justice for himself and others?

The next subject that started up for consideration was the general events of that day, and the question of what colouring would be given to those events at the court of France.

A peaceful body of people, meeting together for the worship of the Almighty, in defiance of no law (for the edict concerning the expulsion of the Protestant pastors, and prohibiting the preaching of the reformed religion at all, had not yet appeared), had been brutally insulted by a body of unauthorized armed men, had been fired upon by them without provocation, and had lost several of their number, murdered in cold blood and in a most cowardly manner, by the hands of the military. They had then, in their own defence, attacked and pursued their brutal assailants, and had slain several of them as a direct consequence of their own crimes.

Such were the simple facts of the case; but what was the tale, the count asked himself, which would be told at the court of France, and vouched for by the words of those who, having committed the great crime of unprovoked murder, would certainly entertain no scruple in regard to justifying it by the lesser crime of a false oath?

"It will be represented," thought the count, "that a body of armed fanatics met for some illegal purpose, and, intending no less than revolt against the king's government, attacked and slaughtered a small body of the royal troops sent to watch their movements. It will be represented that the dragoons fought gallantly against the rebels, and slew a great number of their body; and this, doubtless, will be vouched for by the words of respectable people, all delicately adjusted by Romish fraud; and while the sword and the axe are wetted with the blood of the innocent and the unoffending, the murderer and his accomplices may be loaded with honours and rewards! But it shall not be so if I can stay it," he added. "I will take the bold, perhaps the rash, resolution; I will cast myself in the gap. I will make the truth known, and the voice thereof shall be heard throughout Europe, even if I fall myself. I, at least,

was there unarmed : that can be proved. No weapon has touched my hand during this day, and therefore my testimony may be less suspected."

While he thus pondered, riding slowly on through the thick darkness which had now fallen completely around his path, he passed a little wood, which is called the wood of Jersel to this day ; but, just as he had arrived at the opposite end, two men started out upon him as if to seize the bridle of his horse. Instantly, however, another voice exclaimed from behind, "Back, back ! I told you any one coming the other way. He cannot come that way, fools. We have driven him into the net, and he has but one path to follow. Let the mango on, whoever he is, and disturb him not." The men were by this time drawing back, and they instantly disappeared behind the trees ; while the count rode on with his servant at somewhat a quicker pace.

On his arrival at his own dwelling, Albert of Morseuil proceeded at once to the library of the chateau ; and though Jerome Riquet strongly pressed him to take some refreshment, he applied himself at once to draw up a distinct statement of all that had occurred, nor quitted it till the night had two thirds waned. He then retired to rest, ordering himself to be called, without fail, if anybody came to the chateau demanding to see him. For the first hour, however, after he had lain down, as may well be supposed, he could not close his eyes. The obscurity seemed to encourage thought, and to call up all the fearful memories of the day. It was a fit canvass, the darkness of the night, for imagination to paint such awful pictures on. There is something soothing, however, in the gray twilight of the morning, which came at length, and then, but not till then, the count slept. Though his slumber was disturbed and restless, it was unbroken for several hours ; and it was nearly eleven o'clock in the day, when, starting up suddenly from some troublous dream, he awoke and gazed wildly round the room, not knowing well where he was. The sight of the sun streaming into the apartment, however, showed him how long he had slept ; and, ringing the bell that lay by his bedside, he demanded eagerly of Jerome Riquet, who appeared in an instant, whether no one had been to seek him.

The man replied, "No one," and informed his lord

that the gates of the castle had not been opened during the morning.

"It is strange!" said the count. "If I hear not by twelve," he continued, "I must set off without waiting. Send forward a courier, Riquet, as fast as possible towards Paris, giving notice at the posthouses that I come with four attendants, yourself one, and ordering horses to be prepared, for I must ride post to the capital. Have everything ready in a couple of hours at the latest, for I must distance this morning's ordinary courier, and get to the court before him."

"If you ride as you usually do, my lord," replied the man, "you will easily do that, for you seldom fail to kill all the horses and all the postillions; and if your humble servant were composed of anything but bones and a good wit, you would have worn the flesh off him long ago."

"I am in no mood for jesting, Riquet," replied the count; "see that everything is ready as I have said, and be prepared to accompany me."

Riquet, who was never yet known to have found too little time to do anything on earth, took the rapid orders of his lord extremely coolly, aided him to dress, and then left him. He had scarcely been gone five minutes, however, before he returned with a face somewhat whiter than usual.

"What is the matter, sirrah?" cried the count, somewhat sharply.

"Why, my lord," he said, "here is the mayor, and the adjoint, and the counsellors, arrived in great terror and trepidation, to tell you that Maillard, the carrier, coming down from the way of Nantes with his pack-horses, has seen the body of a young officer tied to a tree in the little wood of Jersel. He was afraid to meddle with it himself, and they were afraid to go down till they had come to tell you."

"Send the men up," said the count, "and have horses saddled for me instantly."

"Now, Sir Mayor," he said, as the local magistrate entered, "what is the meaning of this? What are these news you bring?"

To say sooth, the mayor was somewhat embarrassed in presenting himself before the count, as he had lately shown no slight symptoms of cowardly wavering in regard to the Protestant cause: nor would he have come now had he not been forced to do so by other members

of the town council. He answered, then, with evident hesitation and timidity,

"Terrible news, indeed, my lord! terrible news, indeed! This young man has been murdered, evidently; for he is tied to a tree, and a paper nailed above his head. So says Maillard, who was afraid to go near to read what was written; and then, my lord, I was afraid to go down without your lordship's sanction, as you are *haut justicier* for a great way round."

The count's lip curled with a scornful sneer. "It seems to me," he said, "that Maillard and yourself are two egregious cowards. We will dispense with your presence, Mr. Mayor; and these other gentlemen will go down with me at once to see what this business is. Though the man might be tied to a tree, and very likely much hurt, that did not prove that he was dead; and very likely he might have been recovered, or, at least, have received the sacraments of the church, if Maillard and yourself had thought fit to be speedy in your measures. Come, gentlemen, let us set out at once."

The rebuked mayor slunk away with a hanging head, and the rest of the municipal council, elated exactly in proportion to the depression of their chief, followed the young count, who led the way with a party of his servants to the wood of Jersel. On first entering that part of the road which traversed the wood, the party perceived nothing; and the good citizens of Morseiul drew themselves a little more closely together, affected by certain personal apprehensions in regard to meddling with the night's work of one who seemed both powerful and unscrupulous. A moment after, however, the object which Maillard had seen was presented to their eyes; and, though crowding close together, curiosity got the better of fear, and they followed the count up to the spot.

The moment the Count de Morseiul had heard the tale, he had formed his own conclusion, and in that conclusion he now found himself not wrong. The body that was tied to the tree was that of the young Marquis de Hericourt; but there were circumstances connected with the act of vengeance which had been thus perpetrated, that rendered it even more awful than he had expected to the eyes of the Count de Morseiul.

There was no wound whatsoever upon the body, and the unhappy young man had evidently been tied to the

tree before his death, for his hands, clinched in agony, were full of the large rugged bark of the elm, which he seemed to have torn off in dying. A strong rope round his middle pressed him tight against the tree. His arms and legs were also bound down to it, so that he could not escape; his hat and upper garments were off, and lying at a few yards' distance; and his shoulders and neck were bare, except where his throat was still pressed by the instrument used for his destruction. That instrument was the usual veil of a novice in a Catholic convent, entirely soaked and dabbled in blood, and twisted tightly up into the form of a rope. It had been wound twice round his neck, and evidently tightened till he had died of strangulation. A piece of paper was nailed upon the tree above his head, so high up, indeed, as to be out of the reach of any one present; but on it was written, in a large, bold hand, which could easily be read, these words:

"The punishment inflicted on a murderer of the innocent, by Brown Keroual."

The Count de Morseiul gazed upon the horrible object thus presented to him in deep silence, communing with his own heart; while the magistrates of the town and the attendants, as is common with inferior minds, felt the awe less deeply, and talked it over with each other in an under voice.

"This is very horrible, indeed," said the count at length. "I think, before we do anything in the business, as this gentleman was of the Roman Catholic faith, and an officer in the king's service, we had better send down immediately to the Curé of Maubourg, and ask him to come up to receive the body."

The word of the young count was, of course, law to those who surrounded him; and one of his own attendants having been despatched for the curé, the good man came up, with four or five of the villagers, in less than half an hour. His countenance, which was mild and benevolent, was very sad, for he had received from the messenger an account of what had taken place. The young count, who had some slight personal knowledge of him, and knew him still better by reputation, advanced some way to meet him, saying,

"This is a dreadful event, Monsieur le Curé, and I have thought it better to send for you rather than move the body of this young gentleman myself, knowing him

to have been a Catholic, while all of us here present were of a different faith. Had not life been evidently long extinguished," he continued, "we should not, of course, have scrupled in such a manner; but, as it is, we have acted as we have done, in the hopes of meeting your own views upon the subject."

"You have done quite well and wisely, my son," replied the curé. "Would to God that all dissensions in the church would cease, as I feel sure they would do if all men would act as prudently as you have done."

"And as wisely and moderately as *you always do*, Monsieur le Curé," added the count.

The curé bowed his head and advanced towards the tree, where he read the inscription over the head of the murdered man, and then gazed upon the veil that was round his throat.

He shook his head sadly as he did so, and then, turning to the count, he said, "Perhaps you do not know the key of all this sad story. I heard it before I came hither. This morning, an hour before matins, the bell of the religious house of St. Hermand—you know it well, count, I dare say, a mile or so beyond the *chêne vert*—was rung loudly, and on the portress opening the gate, four men, with their faces covered, carried in the body of one of the novices, called Claire Duval, who had been absent the whole night, causing great alarm. There was a shot-wound in her breast; she was laid out for the grave; and, though none of the men spoke a word, but merely placed the body in the lodge, and then retired, a paper was found with it afterward, saying, 'An innocent girl, murdered by the base De Hericourt, and revenged by Brown Keroual.' This, of course, I imagine, is the body of him called De Hericourt."

"It is, indeed, sir," replied the count, "the young Marquis de Hericourt, a relation not very distant of the Marquis de Louvois; and a brave, but rash, unprincipled, and weak young man he was. In your hands I leave the charge of the body, but any assistance that my servants can give you, or that my influence can procure, are quite at your service."

The curé thanked him for his offer, but only requested that he would send him down some sort of a litter or conveyance to carry the body to the church. The count immediately promised to do so; and, returning

home, he fulfilled his word. He then took some refreshment before his journey, wrote a brief note to the Duc de Rouvré, stating that he would have come over to see him immediately, but was obliged to go to Paris without loss of time; and then, mounting his horse and followed by his attendants, he rode to the first post-house, where, taking posthorses, he proceeded at as rapid a pace as possible towards the capital.

END OF VOL. I.



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